SERMONS,

BY

THE LATE REVEREND

GEORGE CARR, Rev.

SENIOR CLERGYMAN OF THE ENGLISH EPISCOPAL CONGREGATION IN EDINBURGH.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

THE SEVENTH EDITION;

TO WHICH IS PREFIXED,

SOME ACCOUNT OF THE AUTHOR.

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BRITISH MUSEUM

ADVERTISEMENT.

THE Reader may juſtly expect ſome account of an Author whoſe poſthumous works are recommended to his peruſal: but what incidents worth communicating to the Public, can be expected to diverſify the life of a clergyman, placed in an humble ſtation, and more ſtudious of diſplaying, through the whole courſe of it, the meekneſs and humility, the mild virtues and gentle ſpirit of the goſpel, than ambitious of acquiring honors, wealth, or fame?

THE Author of theſe Diſcourſes was born at Newcaſtle upon Tyne, the 16th of February 1704-5. He was educated at St. John's College, Cambridge; where he took the degree of Bachelor of Arts. Soon after his return to Newcaſtle, he went into Orders: and in the year 1737, he was appointed Senior Clergyman of the Epiſcopal Chapel at Edinburgh; where he ſpent the remainder of his days. And though moſt ſeverely and frequently afflicted with the gout, the paroxyſms of which he bore with wonderful patience and reſignation, he continued to officiate to the very cloſe of his life. For on the morning of Sunday the 18th Auguſt 1776, he was preparing, as uſual, to diſcharge his duty in the pulpit; when, without any unuſual appearances of diſeaſe, or any alarming ſymptom of his approaching diſſolution, he ſuddenly expired.

It is but juſtice to his memory to mention, that the following Diſcourſes do not appear to have been prepared by the Author for the preſs; they were ſelected by the Editor out of a great many, as of moſt general utility, and of courſe moſt worthy the notice of the Public. It is hoped, they are of ſufficient merit to bear ample teſtimony to his learning, taſte, and eloquence, as a Preacher. His virtues as a Man and a Chriſtian, are briefly, but faithfully, ſummed up in the following monumental inſcription.

Near

Near this Place are depoſited
The REMAINS
of
THE REVEREND GEORGE CARR,
Senior Clergyman of this Chapel;
In whom
Meekneſs and Moderation,
Unaffected Piety,
and
Univerſal Benevolence,
Were equally and eminently conſpicuous.

After having faithfully diſcharged the Duties
of
His ſacred function
During thirty-nine Years,
He died
On the 18th Auguſt 1776,
In the 71ſt Year of his Age,
Beloved, Honoured, Lamented!

His Congregation,
Deeply ſenſible of the loſs they have ſuſtained
By the Death of this excellent Perſon,
By whoſe mild yet pathetic Eloquence,
By whoſe exemplary yet engaging Manners,
They have been ſo long inſtructed in the Duties
and
Animated to the Practice
of
Pure Religion,
Have erected this Monument,
To record
The Virtues of the Dead
and
Gratitude of the Living.

TO

THE CONGREGATION

OF THE ENGLISH EPISCOPAL CHAPEL

AT EDINBURGH,

FOR WHOSE INSTRUCTION

THESE DISCOURSES WERE COMPOSED,

BEFORE WHOM THEY WERE DELIVERED,

AND

AT WHOSE REQUEST

THEY ARE NOW SENT INTO THE WORLD;

THESE VOLUMES,

IN GRATEFUL REMEMBRANCE OF

THE ESTEEM, AFFECTION, AND RESPECT,

INVARIABLY SHOWN BY THEM

TO THE AUTHOR WHILE ALIVE,

ARE MOST HUMBLY INSCRIBED

BY

HIS DISCONSOLATE WIDOW.

CONTENTS

OF THE FIRST VOLUME.

	Page
I. *Happineſs of being under the government of Providence,*	9
II. *Duty of conſideration,*	16
III. *The evidences of the Goſpel intitled to our aſſent,*	22
IV. *Againſt ſcoffing at religion,*	28
V. *On myſteries in religion.*——Preached on Trinity-Sunday,	36
VI. *Parable of the talents,*	43
VII. *The prayer of Augur conſidered and explained,*	50
VIII. *Cauſes of propenſity to peculiar vices,*	58
IX. *On faith,*	64
X. *Inſufficiency of this world to our happineſs, and the conſequent probability of a future ſtate,*	71
XI. *Marks of being ſincerely religious,*	78
XII. *Government of the Paſſions,*	85
XIII. *On afflictions,*	92
XIV. *On the fear of God,*	99
XV. *Utility of the light of Revelation,*	106
XVI. *God's judgments a motive to holineſs,*—Preached after the earth-quake at Liſbon,	113
XVII. *Our Saviour's example recommended to our imitation,*	123
XVIII. *Requiſites of prayer,*	130
XIX. *On death,*	138
XX. *On truſt in God,*	146
XXI. *On univerſal obedience,*	152
XXII. *On the univerſal preſence and knowledge of God,*	158
XXIII. *Cauſes of error,*	164
XXIV. *Danger of a late penitence*—Preached in Lent,	171
XXV. *On humility,*	178
XXVI. *On Charity and mercy.*——Preached at a Collection for the Royal Infirmary, Edinburgh,	184

CONTENTS

OF THE SECOND VOLUME.

	Page
I. *Wiſdom of a religious courſe of life,*	195
II. *Religious employment of time,*	202
III. *Error of conforming to faſhionable vices,*	208
IV. *On conſcience,*	214
V. *Houſe of mourning,*	221
VI. *Poſitive inſtitutions inferior to moral duties,*	228
VII. *Goodneſs of God in the redemption,*	234
VIII. *On reſignation to the will of God,*	241
IX. *On the general judgment,*	248
X. *On public worſhip.*—Preached at opening the New Epiſcopal Chapel at Edinburgh,	255
XI. *Internal excellence of the Goſpel,*	265
XII. *Aſcenſion,*	271
XIII. *On Divine Grace and human co-operation,*	279
XIV. *Againſt an improper love of this world,*	287
XV. *Sin of profaning the name of God,*	293
XVI. *Duty of doing as we would be done by,*	298
XVII. *Sins of infirmity and preſumption,*	305
XVIII. *On the Reſurrection,*	312
XIX. *On peace,*	319
XX. *On contentment,*	325
XXI. *Duty of exemplary manners,*	331
XXII. *Peace of mind the attendant on virtue,*	337
XXIII. *Methods by which God has revealed his will to mankind,*	343
XXIV. *General inſtances of God's goodneſs to men,*	350
XXV. *Men ſojourners upon earth.*—Preached on New-Year's day,	357
XXVI. *Againſt evil-ſpeaking,*	363
XVII. *On vitious habits,*	370

SERMON

SERMON I.

Happineſs of being under the Government of PROVIDENCE.

PSAL. xcvii. 1.

The Lord is King, the earth may be glad thereof.

OF all the erroneous doctrines ever advanced by the adverſaries of religion, none can be more void of foundation, or more pernicious in its influence, than the opinion, that the world received its being, and ſtill ſubſiſts, without the agency of a ſupreme, ſuperintending Intelligence. From the ſlighteſt view of the works of nature, we may infer the exiſtence of an all-powerful, all-wiſe Being, the eternal and original Cauſe of all things. The whole creation utters this great and leading truth to mankind in a language ſo clear and intelligible, that *none but the fool can ſay, There is no God.* Whether we look up to the firmament above, or down upon the face of the earth; whether we conſider how wonderfully we ourſelves, or all other beings, are made, —we ſhall find that every thing above or beneath, every thing within or without us, the whole frame of nature, the whole ſyſtem of wonders that preſent themſelves to us, proclaim with a thouſand voices the hand that made them. It were endleſs to enumerate all the particulars which concur to evince this truth. In general, the power, wiſdom, and deſign, conſpicuous in the whole ſyſtem of nature; the ſigns of divine workmanſhip viſible in the heavens; the ſtructure of this earth, allotted for our habitation, and ſo well fitted up and furniſhed for the uſe of various tribes of creatures, and of man its principal inhabitant; the exquiſite ſkill and amazing art that appear in the form and

properties of vegetables, in the organs and faculties of animals, in the mechaniſm, particularly, of the human body ſo wonderfully made; and above all, the frame of the ſoul, and its various intellectual powers; are clear proofs of an original creating Mind. For is it poſſible to conceive, that all theſe effects, theſe evident appearances of counſel and wiſdom, can proceed from the undirected, fortuitous motions of unconſcious matter? Can we imagine, that all the regularity, harmony, and order we ſee in the general ſyſtem of things, can be derived from chance, whoſe nature it is to be irregular and ever varying from itſelf? Can chance give ſteady and uniform laws to nature? Can chance act with all the exactneſs and accuracy of unerring ſkill and infinite contrivance? If, when we ſurvey a palace, and obſerve the grandeur and ſymmetry of the whole, and the elegance and juſt diſpoſition of its parts, we never fail to infer the ſkill and ability of the architect; ſhall we not much more, when we contemplate the univerſe, the palace of the ALMIGHTY; when we view the beauty and magnificence that every where appear; when we ſee all the characters of infinite wiſdom and power in the deſign and execution, and all the expreſſions of ſuch art as no art can ſurpaſs; ſhall we not diſcern an all-wiſe, omnipotent Architect, who planned and erected the amazing fabric? In ſhort, all the works of creation bear ſuch evident teſtimony to the agency of a Divine Intelligence, that the farther we carry our inquiries into the conſtitution of nature, we meet with ſo many more ſtill clearer evidences of a perfectly wiſe, powerful and good Author of it: the proofs of his exiſtence multiply upon us ſo faſt, and appear ſo endleſs and inexhauſtible, that it ſcarce ſeems credible that a principle of Atheiſm ſhould ever find admiſſion into the human underſtanding.

And as certain as it is that there is a GOD who created all things, ſo certain is it that he acts as ſovereign of the univerſe; that his ſupreme providence ruleth over all things, and has the care and ſuperintendence of his creation. For were we to ſuppoſe it otherwiſe, and that the world is not under the care and government of its Creator; no other reaſon could be aſſigned, than that he is either wanting in power or inclination, unable or unwil-

unwilling to govern it. But neither of theſe ſuppoſitions can be admitted. He who was able to create the world, cannot want ability to ſuperintend and govern it. All the powers of nature muſt be dependent on HIM who gave them their being. All things muſt obey that Voice which ſpoke the word, and they were made; were made from nothing; and, with regard to any reſiſtance they can make to that Voice, are as nothing ſtill. The whole world is in HIS hands juſtly repreſented only as a drop of the morning-dew, or as the duſt of the balance, which he may diſſipate with the leaſt breath of his power. To him it is infinitely eaſy to preſide over all events, to direct all the influences of natural cauſes, to govern all contingencies, to provide for the intereſts of communities and kingdoms, and for the ſecurity and happineſs of every individual in them. As, then, the Supreme BEING cannot be ſuppoſed to be defective in power to govern the world, ſo neither can he be wanting in inclination. For is it reaſonable to think, that GOD takes no care of the world, which, with ſo much care and wiſdom, he created? Is it reaſonable to ſuppoſe, that he who introduced us into being, and by that act contracted the relation of a parent to us, with all the obligation of affectionate care and paternal regard reſulting from it; is it reaſonable, is it poſſible, to ſuppoſe, that he would give up all regard and attention to his creatures, his children, his family upon earth? He who gave us being, muſt be concerned for our well-being too. He who is perfect wiſdom and goodneſs, will in every inſtance, take ſuch care of us as perfect goodneſs and wiſdom require. And indeed, far from ſuppoſing in GOD any diſinclination to ſuperintend and govern the world, we cannot form to ourſelves an employment more glorious in itſelf, or more worthy of his infinite perfections, than from his throne in heaven to inſpect the immeaſurable dominions of his univerſal empire; to have the adminiſtration of all its affairs, the appointment of all events, and to conduct the whole with unerring wiſdom and unreſtricted goodneſs. With great truth and propriety, therefore, the text aſſerts, that the LORD is King, and conſequently that the earth may be

glad thereof.——For what can afford more rational grounds of the ſublimeſt joy, than the conſideration that God governs the earth? What can adminiſter more comfort, than the aſſurance, that we live not in a forſaken and fatherleſs world, are not deſerted by the great Parent of nature; not abandoned to the power of chance or fate; but are always under the protection of an infinitely wiſe and good Sovereign, in whoſe preſence and under whoſe eye we live, whoſe great and conſtant object is the ſecurity and felicity of his creatures and ſubjects, and without whoſe permiſſion no power can injure and no evil approach us? Let us conſider the ſtate and condition of human nature, and we ſhall find the juſteſt grounds to rejoice in the government and protection of this almighty Sovereign. Inſufficient to our own happineſs; uncertain of what we hope for; inſecure even of what we poſſeſs; often encompaſſed with difficulties which we cannot ſurmount; ſurrounded often with dangers which we have neither ſagacity to foreſee, nor ability to oppoſe, nor ſkill to elude; full of wants and frailties in ourſelves; expoſed to injuries and violence from others; thus beſet on all ſides, liable to diſorders within, and to diſaſters without; what ſecurity could we have againſt dangers, or what conſolation under them, were we capable of conceiving that there is no Power above who can either divert the evils that threaten us, or ſupport us under them; no ſuperior Being, to whom we might appeal, and on whoſe goodneſs we might repoſe a confidence? To the eye of Reaſon, what a dreadful wilderneſs would life appear; how gloomy would be the proſpect, how uncomfortable our pilgrimage through it, did we not believe, that there is an all-powerful and all-gracious hand that inviſibly guides our ſteps, conducts us through the various accidents that beſet us, and through all the thouſand dangers that are planted in our way!—If there were arguments ſufficient to perſuade us that there is not a God that governs the world, (as there are very ſufficient proofs of the contrary); yet the belief of a ſupreme Providence is of ſuch conſequence to our happineſs, ſo eſſential to our well-being, that a wiſe man would be ſorry to give up ſo pleaſing an error, to awake from ſuch a dream

a dream of felicity, and to part with a deluſion that ſpeaks ſo much peace and ſatisfaction to the mind. For, which way ſoever we turn our thoughts, let them wander through the whole earth, let them range the whole circuit of nature, the mind will find no reſt, no ſufficient ſupport, no probable foundation of happineſs, but in the being and providence of GOD. No other principle but this, embraced with a ſteady faith, and attended with a ſuitable practice, can ever be able to give repoſe and tranquillity to the mind; to animate our hopes, or extinguiſh our fears; to give us any true ſatisfaction in the enjoyments of life, or to miniſter conſolation under its adverſities. If we are perſuaded, that GOD governs the world, that he has the ſuperintendance and direction of all events, and that we are the objects of his providential care; whatever may be our diſtreſs or our danger, we can never want conſolation; we may always have a fund of hope, always a proſpect of relief. But, take away this hope and this proſpect, take away the belief of GOD and of a ſuperintending providence, and man would be of all creatures moſt miſerable; deſtitute of every comfort, every ſupport, under preſent ſufferings, and of every ſecurity againſt future dangers. *Whom have I in heaven but thee?* ſays the Pſalmiſt; *and there is none upon earth that I deſire in compariſon of thee.* GOD is indeed the chief happineſs of man. And certain it is, that were a wiſe man left to his choice, to wiſh the greateſt poſſible felicity to himſelf and to mankind, the higheſt wiſh he could form would be, that there were juſt ſuch a being as we apprehend that GOD is: a Being poſſeſſed of every deſirable perfection; whoſe power is equal to his wiſdom, and his goodneſs commenſurate to both; whoſe providence extends to all his works, to the whole world, and to every individual in it; watches over us, though we forget him; is mindful of us when we are neglectful of ourſelves; and is always inclined, as far as he ſees it conſiſtent with wiſdom and rectitude, and with our happineſs upon the whole, to heal all our ſorrows, to ſupply all our wants, to crown all our hopes, and to diſſipate all our fears. *The Lord is my light and my ſalvation,* ſays the Pſalmiſt: and indeed he is the true light of the world, that glad-

dens the whole creation. The ſun itſelf is not more neceſſary to the preſervation of our being, than is GOD, the Sun of the intellectual ſyſtem, to the well-being of mankind.—But, on the other hand, Infidelity or Atheiſm takes this Sun as it were out of our firmament, and involves all nature in darkneſs. The ſcheme of Atheiſm is calculated to ſpread a gloom over the whole intellectual and moral world, to ſubvert the moſt ſolid foundations of human happineſs, and to finiſh and complete the miſeries of mankind. It renders it impoſſible (if we have any reflection) to taſte pleaſure even in proſperity, and in the ſeaſons of adverſity adds bitterneſs to every ſorrow; takes away all comfort from the virtuous, all hope from the afflicted; leaves us unprotected here, and unrewarded hereafter; robs us of our beſt enjoyments in life, and of all conſolation and ſupport in death.

For what ſupport could we find under the approach of our diſſolution, what conſolation when we are about to deſcend into the dark region of death, if we had no relief in GOD, no dependence on the goodneſs of our Maker, no hope that his hand would conduct us through that gloomy vale, would ſupport us under the awfulneſs of its terrors, and raiſe us up in another, happier ſtate? How melancholy would be our condition, and how dreadful our proſpect, if we had nothing before us but the ſad apprehenſions either of utter extinction in the grave, or of ſome uncertain, perhaps unhappy, exiſtence, which might poſſibly be our lot, amidſt the endleſs revolutions of Chance, or by the laws of irreſiſtible Fate! If it were true, and we could be aſſured, that there is no GOD who made, and no Providence that governs the world, it would be a melancholy truth, which we ſhould have reaſon to mourn as long as we have a being. Unprotected by a Superior Power, we ſhould be expoſed to every ſpecies of evil; nor could we be ſure, that we and our ſufferings would be extinguiſhed even in the grave. We could have no aſſurance, that we ſhould not be dragged by ſome fatal chain of cauſes from the preſent to ſome more unhappy ſtate. But, happily for us, every thing within and without us tells us, in the ſilent language of nature,

that

that there is a GOD,—there is a Creator and Governor of the world. And how does our proſpect brighten up when we change the view, and conſider ourſelves under the care and tutelage of a GOD, by whoſe providence all things are conducted; whoſe mercies are over all his works; who has all events in his hands, and can do whatſoever pleaſeth him, but never pleaſeth to do but what is right and good! How may we congratulate ourſelves, that we are under the protection of ſo much goodneſs! how rejoice, that HE to whom all things in heaven and earth are obedient, deigns to conſider us as objects of his care! What though we are beſet with dangers, expoſed to numberleſs accidents, to many known, many unknown evils? Yet we are ſure, that we are befriended by infinite goodneſs, and protected by omnipotent power: we know, that an all-ſeeing eye watcheth over us, and that an almighty arm defends us as with a ſhield. This conſideration ought always, in every ſituation, and in all circumſtances, to ſupport our hopes, and ſpeak peace to the mind. If there is a GOD; if he is the ſovereign of nature, and holds the ſceptre of the univerſe; however gloomy appearances may be, there is always room for conſolation and hope. If GOD be for us, it imports little who is againſt us; if he is on our ſide, we need not fear what man, what the world can do unto us.——But let it be remembered, that, in order to recommend ourſelves to his protection, it muſt be our habitual endeavour to render ourſelves worthy of it; to demean ourſelves as good ſubjects of his government; to live in a faithful allegiance and dutiful ſubmiſſion to him, the great King of all the earth; and to pay him the homage of a conſtant attention to his will, and the tribute of a willing obedience to his laws. Then may we hope to live ſecure under his government and protection, whilſt we are in this world; and when we depart, to be received into manſions of ſupreme felicity, into his eternal kingdom; where we ſhall be for ever happy in his preſence, for ever be the bleſſed objects of his goodneſs, as he will be of our praiſe; and where we ſhall join in concert with the heavenly hoſt, in joyful and perpetual adorations of the Sovereign of the univerſe.

SERMON II.

Duty of CONSIDERATION.

PSAL. CXIX. 59.

I called mine own ways to remembrance, and turned my feet unto thy teſtimonies.

WE are deſigned by the Author of our being, and diſpoſed by the frame of our nature, not implicitly to follow the guidance of ſenſe, inſtinct, propenſities, or paſſions, but to form and regulate our whole deportment by the ſuperior principles of reaſon and duty. We ought, conſequently, often to call our ways to remembrance, to examine and review our conduct, and conſider what behaviour reaſon and duty require from us. The Author of our nature conferred on us the privilege of reaſon, in order to give us a juſt diſcernment of good and evil, to point out the different paths of virtue and vice, and the oppoſite regions of happineſs or miſery to which they lead. And to ſhow us ſtill more diſtinctly the conſequences of our actions, GOD has added the light of Revelation to that of Reaſon; which clearly acquaints us with the meaſure of our duty, and with the final event of our conduct. It highly becomes us to attend to this light, which he has held out to us; it infinitely concerns us to live up to its directions. And as, amidſt thoſe ſcenes of pleaſure which are continually paſſing before us and ſoliciting our affection, we are but too apt to be inattentive, to loſe ſight of our duty, and ſometimes to fall through the deceitfulneſs of ſin; the only method of maintaining or recovering our integrity is, to commune with our heart and call our ways to remembrance; to ſtand ſtill ſometimes, and obſerve whither the path we are in will lead us; if we are in the right way, that we may walk in it with complacency and aſſurance; if we have turned aſide to the right hand or to the left, that we may ſtop ſhort before we have wandered too far in the mazes of ſin. To this end, we

ſhould

ſhould occaſionally enter upon a ſerious ſcrutiny into our ſpiritual ſtate, that we may look well if there be any wickedneſs in us;—whether there be any ſin which we have not repented of;—any duty which we have too much neglected;—any injury done to our neighbour, for which we have not made reparation;—any diſtempers in the mind which require attention, and for which remedies ought to be applied:—that we may ſearch and examine our heart, and find out what good diſpoſitions we ought to cheriſh in it, what bad ones to ſuppreſs; how many of the latter ſort remain to be weeded out, how many of the former to be planted and cultivated.

If we omit this duty, we may fall inſenſibly into acts, and gradually into habits, of ſin. If we neglect this care, this moral huſbandry of the mind, various vices may ſoon ſhoot up and over-run it: for they are the ſpontaneous produce of the ſoil, the natural growth of our corruption;—they require no care nor culture, but flouriſh moſt when moſt neglected.

So feeble, indeed, is our nature, and ſo powerful and numerous our temptations, that we ought always with unremitting diligence to guard our hearts. But ſuch is the deceitfulneſs of ſin, that, in order to deſtroy us, it firſt infatuates. Vice is ever diſinclined to dwell and aſſociate with Reaſon: it perſuades the ſinner, therefore, to ſhun conſideration; to ſhut his ears to the monitions of conſcience; not to allow himſelf leiſure to think, nor coolneſs to deliberate; but to keep his mind employed abroad in foreign purſuits, in order to prevent its returning home and giving a painful attention to domeſtic cares; or to fly to any exceſs that may help him to forget himſelf and his fears, and hide him from his own reflections.

But however artful the ſinner may be in keeping off reflection, yet the ſeaſon of reflection will come. Miſfortune, ſickneſs, or age, will introduce it: and then conſcience will arreſt, and call him to account; will reſume its place and authority; and with a voice not to be ſilenced, will then ſeverely remind him, that he is accountable to a Being whoſe juſtice no artifice can elude, and from whoſe eye no darkneſs can conceal; that though

though he may deceive the world, or even his own heart, yet he cannot deceive God, who is greater than his heart, and knoweth all things.

How much wiſer is it, then, to attend to this internal monitor, whilſt it admoniſhes and adviſes with a friendly voice, than to ſhut our ears to its admonitions, till it can ſpeak to us only in accuſations and reproaches! How much better to call home our wandering thoughts, and to conſider our ways, whilſt we can do it with comfort, and confidence in the divine mercy, than to defer this needful work, till conſcious guilt ſhall lie in wait for us, and meet us in every reflection! How much more prudent to advert to our danger when it is in our power to avoid it, than to ruſh blindfold upon deſtruction, or to go on amuſing ourſelves with a miſtaken falſe ſecurity till we have approached too near the precipice to eſcape it!

It concerns us, therefore, frequently to examine and aſk our heart, in what manner we have acquitted ourſelves in the duties required of us. Have we acted in conformity to the deſign of our Creator when he gave us our being? Has it been our firſt and principal care to obſerve the rules and precepts of the religion he has preſcribed? Have we duly cultivated thoſe ſeeds of virtue and goodneſs which he has ſown in our hearts? Have they taken root, and brought forth in us the fruit of good living? or have they not, as ſoon as they ſprung up, been choaked by the idle cares, or idler pleaſures, of the world? Have we, as good and faithful ſervants, diligently employed the talents intruſted to our care in ſuch uſeful and benevolent offices as piety and virtue demand from us? If to theſe interrogatories our heart can reply without ſelf-conviction, let us go on and proceed to a ſtill farther proficiency in all virtue and goodneſs.

Sin is to the ſoul what diſeaſe is to the body; and it is conſideration only which can heal its ſores, and reſtore the ſoul's health. To a good man this practice will give that conſcious pleaſure, that ſecret ſelf-ſatisfaction, which ariſes in the mind from the approbation of its own actions. For he whoſe heart is animated with pious and devout affections to the Supreme Being; who,

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from veneration for his greatneſs, gratitude for his mercies, and juſt ſentiments of his goodneſs, endeavours to pay him an unreſerved obedience; whoſe habitual care it is to be faithful and juſt in all his dealings, and, as far as may be, to contribute to the well-being and happineſs of his fellow-creatures; to indulge no inclinations that are injurious to others; to keep himſelf in a fit diſpoſition for the diſcharge of his duties both to GOD and man,—cannot but review his conduct with a peculiar ſatisfaction and complacency.

But to the ſinner this duty of conſideration, this moral review, is of the firſt importance. For unleſs he calls his ways to remembrance, how ſhall he become ſenſible of his danger? or how retreat from a danger of which he is not made duly ſenſible? By neglecting this duty, he may go on from ſin to ſin, and continue his progreſs through the ſeveral ſucceſſive ſtages of iniquity, till at laſt, when he looks round and ſurveys his ſituation, he may ſee nothing behind him but ſcenes of unrepented guilt; nothing before him but the certain conſequences, a dreadful eternity, and an offended GOD! Whereas, if we ſtop ſhort of our progreſs in order to deliberate, a little reflexion will teach us, that ſin is the reproach of our reaſon, the diſhonour of our nature, the bane of all our preſent and future happineſs. Reflection will ſhow it in its native deformity, ſtripped of that thin diſguiſe, and thoſe counterfeit ornaments, in which the paſſions and folly of mankind endeavour to decorate and dreſs it. We ſhall find that it is a dangerous oppoſition to, and rebellion againſt, that Sovereign Being under whoſe inſpection we live and move, and who will ſooner or later vindicate the authority and honour of his laws; that it is ingratitude to our heavenly Father and Benefactor, whoſe goodneſs gave us exiſtence; whoſe providence kindly ſupports and protects it, with a care that never ſlumbers; whoſe bounty has ſupplied the neceſſaries, conveniencies, and bleſſings of life; for which he deſires no returns but gratitude and obedience; which are not at all advantageous to him, but highly ſo to ourſelves: that the conſequences of ſin muſt be to the

the laſt degree fatal, if not in this world, moſt certainly in the next.

Such indeed is the weakneſs or negligence of mankind, ſuch their inattention to their actions, that ſeldom they ſeriouſly deliberate on conſequences; leaſt of all on thoſe which are of eternal and infinite concernment. Seldom they conſider in what troubles, anxieties, and diſtreſſes, their iniquities and vices may involve them even in this world; what anguiſh, ſorrow and remorſe, may overtake them before they bid adieu to it; with what confuſion they muſt be covered when death approaches; and what terrors will accompany them when they are entering into eternity.

All the deluſions by which we are enſnared and betrayed into ſin, will, when traced to their ſource, be found to proceed from want of conſideration. It concerns every one, therefore, the ſinner particularly, often to deliberate, often to call home his ſcattered thoughts, and thus to commune with his heart: "Short and uncertain is my remaining portion of years; and the grave and eternity cannot be far diſtant. Soon I muſt bid adieu to the world, ſoon paſs from the preſent to a very different ſcene, where the criminal enjoyments which now employ all my attention will vaniſh, and nothing of them remain but the bitter remembrance of their guilt. I muſt then appear before the awful tribunal of an infinitely juſt, and holy, and impartial judge; where I muſt render a ſtrict account of all the tranſactions of my life, where even my thoughts and intentions will be ſcrutiniſed; where all my ſins will riſe up in judgment againſt me; and a deciſive, irreverſible ſentence paſs which will fix my doom for eternal ages."

Such reflexions, often and ſeriouſly attended to, muſt rouſe the moſt careleſs, and alarm the moſt determined; muſt incite and animate us to act as becomes men, as reaſon, conſcience, duty, and intereſt, invite; muſt make us take heed to our ways, be ſolicitous to avoid every thing that may provoke the diſpleaſure of our Judge, and to abound in piety and virtue, which alone

alone can procure his approbation and acceptance, and intitle us to a gracious ſentence from him.

A few ſhort, occaſional, or tranſient reflections on theſe truths, may indeed produce little or no effect upon our lives. They muſt be frequently repeated, be admitted often, be as it were daily viſitants, and become familiar to the mind, before they can acquire influence enough to govern our affections, and become the principles of an uniform piety. In order therefore, to give them full poſſeſſion of the heart, and that they may exert all their power and influence in forming and preſerving in us a juſt and laſting ſenſe of the obligations of religion, we ought to give a frequent attendance on the duties of divine worſhip: For nothing can be more effectual to correct inadvertent levity, to direct our attention to religious objects, and to engage us in a courſe of ſerious reflections, than a regular attendance on the ſervice of God.

May that Almighty Being in whoſe preſence we now appear, give us grace ever to ſerve and obey him in righteouſneſs and true holineſs! May he create in us ſuch new and contrite hearts, that we, calling our ways to remembrance, and acknowledging our wretchedneſs, may obtain of him, the God of all mercy, perfect remiſſion and forgiveneſs!

SERMON III.

The Evidences of the GOSPEL entitled to our Aſſent.

LUKE xvi. 31.

And he ſaid unto him, If they hear not Moſes and the prophets, neither will they be perſuaded though one roſe from the dead.

AMONG the various pleas aſſigned for not living up to the principles of the Chriſtian religion, one is, a pretended want of conviction of its divine authority. The evidences of the goſpel, ſome alledge, are doubtful and defective. If the Deity, ſay they, had thought proper to communicate a revelation of his will, and to exact an univerſal obedience to it, he would have afforded ſuch means of conviction, as would have diſſipated all obſcurity and uncertainties, and not have ſuffered his creatures to riſk their ſalvation for want of ſufficient light to conduct them into the way of truth. We with-hold our aſſent, therefore (thus they argue), becauſe we want the proper grounds of aſſent. But if the Divine Being thought proper to ſupport the authority of the goſpel by a repetition of miracles; if ſome preter-natural appearance ſhould be exhibited for its atteſtation; or if a meſſenger ſhould ariſe from the dead, and bring with him a faithful, authentic narrative of the ſtate and condition of ſouls departed, and of the rewards and puniſhments in another life—we would then reſign our ſcruples, and yield an implicit faith, as well as an abſolute obedience, to its doctrines and precepts.

Such is the language ſometimes held, in order to juſtify a rejection of the goſpel, and a neglect of its duties: but how vain and groundleſs ſuch language is, may be inferred from the determination in the text: *If they hear not Moſes and the prophets, neither will they be perſuaded though one roſe from the dead.* Which words are the concluſion of our bleſſed Saviour's parable; wherein is repreſented a rich man, of an uncharitable temper and

and immoral conduct, who, after he had enjoyed the good things (as they are called) of this world for a ſeaſon, died, and was conveyed to a place of torment. In this ſituation, he lifted up his eyes; and ſeeing Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his boſom, i. e. in a ſtate of felicity, he ſolicited compaſſion, and an alleviation of his miſery: *Father Abraham have mercy on me, and ſend Lazarus that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame.* But finding his doom irreverſible, and his anguiſh incapable of mitigation, he offered a laſt requeſt, for his ſurviving brethren, that one might be permitted to return from the dead and teſtify unto them; *leſt*, ſays he, *they alſo come into this place of torment.* The ſureſt method to make an impreſſion on their minds and diſpoſe them to amendment, was, he conceived, to diſpatch a meſſenger from the dead to admoniſh them of their danger; one who had experienced another ſtate, and could not therefore fail to convince them of the certainty of it. But this requeſt was denied, and his brethren referred to the evidence already given: *They have Moſes and the prophets; let them hear them.* The tormented perſon, conſidering that evidence as inſufficient for their conviction. importunately renewed his petition, ſuppoſing the teſtimony he deſired would moſt certainly be effectual: *Nay, Father Abraham; but if one went unto them from the dead they will repent.* But this was a miſtake, and was accordingly corrected by the father of the faithful, in this definitive ſentence: *If they hear not Moſes and the prophets, neither will they be perſuaded though one roſe from the dead.* If they yield not to the preſent evidences of religion, and can reſiſt its powerful and convictive proofs, they would, for the ſame reaſons, reject every other means of conviction, even the monitions of a meſſenger ſent from the dead.

The Omnipotent may indeed over-rule the powers of the ſoul, and compel our aſſent: *The hearts of men are in the hands of the Lord, as the rivers of water; and he can turn them whitherſoever he will.*——He may, by a particular miracle, give to the unbeliever ſuch an evident demonſtration, and ſo clear a conviction of the truth,

truth, as would at once diſſipate all uncertainty and render his aſſent unavoidable.—— But we are to obſerve, that, for the ſame reaſon any one perſon could expect the favour of a particular miracle for his conviction, every other perſon might with equal juſtice form the ſame expectations. And if all men were to be indulged in their demand of miracles, what evidence might not preſumption aſk? what ſcenes of confuſion might enſue? what diſorder and diſtraction among the works of nature, whilſt the ſun went backward, or forward, or ſtood ſtill for a day, or left us involved in darkneſs in the midſt of his courſe? It is not eaſy to ſay what unreaſonable demands ſome might make, if nature were obedient to their will; or what malicious and revengeful purpoſes might be executed, if the thunder of the Almighty were entruſted into the hands of men.

But not to inſiſt upon this, nor upon the contradictory demands which might ſometimes be made by different perſons, (in which caſe Infinite Power itſelf could not give them ſatisfaction), it may only be obſerved, that if the caprice of every individual were to be at all times gratified with what particular miracle he pleaſed to requeſt, this would diminiſh, inſtead of adding to, the evidence of our religion. For miracles, by becoming thus frequent and familiar, would ceaſe to be any longer miracles to us. Should we daily ſee ſome of our departed brethren return to life, as our Lord did after his crucifixion, we ſhould be no more ſurpriſed at a reſurrection from the dead, than we are now at a recovery from ſickneſs; and our Saviour's divine authority and doctrine could receive no confirmation from that event. If it were as common to ſee bodies riſe from the grave, as corn from ſeed ſown in the earth, we ſhould endeavour to account for the one, as for the other, from natural cauſes, without having recourſe to the interpoſition of Heaven. So that, were all the wonderful works of CHRIST and his apoſtles, which to unprejudiced perſons have eſtabliſhed Chriſtianity beyond all doubt, were they to become common and familiar, ſuch as we had frequently before us, and every day occurred, it is certain we ſhould be far from eſteeming them miracles: we ſhould conſider them only as natural events, and behold

behold them without any emotion or ſurpriſe. And thoſe new ſigns and daily prodigies which the infidel requires, would be ſo far from giving him any further evidence, that they would entirely deprive him of the evidence he has: becauſe what we now call wonderful works, when they thus become uſual and frequent, would be no longer wonderful; and the commonneſs of miracles would deſtroy their very being. Chriſtianity, therefore, inſtead of receiving additional evidence from a daily repetition of miracles, would be entirely ſtripped of the evidence of any miracles at all.

When GOD is pleaſed to favour the world with a revelation of his will, it will be a ſufficient proof of the authenticity of ſuch revelation, if its doctrines and duties are conſonant to our natural notions of the Deity; and if, at the time of its firſt promulgation, it receive the ſanction of Almighty Power, and be confirmed by ſuch ſigns and wonders and mighty works as plainly point out a divine interpoſition.

A revelation thus eſtabliſhed, and fixed upon this firm baſis, has from that moment a claim to a divine original; and we, who live at a remote diſtance from its firſt eſtabliſhment, can deſire no other proof of its authority, than a full, clear, and concurrent teſtimony, of all the intermediate ages from that time to our own, that ſuch mighty works were wrought, that ſuch miracles were publickly exhibited, by the firſt promulgers of this revelation, as the credentials of their commiſſion from GOD.

All this, and more, we have to induce us to acquieſce in the divine authority of the Goſpel. We have the teſtimony of every age ſince the riſe of Chriſtianity, with one voice proclaiming its truth, and aſſerting, that our bleſſed LORD wrought many miracles, was crucified, roſe again, and aſcended into heaven: that the apoſtles ſaw and converſed with him after his reſurrection, and ſealed their teſtimony with their blood: that this teſtimony was not merely human; that they alſo were enabled to perform many wonderful works, in confirmation of their evidence: that though the world was up in arms againſt this new religion, yet it triumphed over all oppoſition, prevailed againſt received cuſtoms and eſtab-

liſhed opinions; againſt the prejudices of education, and the ſtubbornneſs of ſuperſtition; againſt the writings of the learned, and the perſecutions of the powerful; and all this without force, without power or policy, without eloquence, without any addreſs or artful application to the paſſions or intereſts of men, by its own intrinſic excellence, and the clear evidence of miracles. ——This is what antiquity loudly aſſerts; this is the information conveyed down to us through the channel of tradition, in a clear and continued ſtream; and the preſent eſtabliſhment of Chriſtianity in the world (of which we ourſelves are witneſſes, and of which we conſtitute a part) is derived from this, and founded upon it.

Are they then ſincere lovers of truth, who refuſe their aſſent to a teſtimony ſo clear and convictive? When they give credit to Heathen hiſtorians, at the ſame time that they refuſe it to the hiſtory of the goſpel, which, in point of credibility, is, on many accounts, far ſuperior to any hiſtory in the world; to what can this be owing but to prejudice? When teſtimony is ſubmitted to in one caſe, and a much ſtronger teſtimony not ſubmitted to in another, what is it but partiality that makes the diſtinction? Whilſt the heathen hiſtorians are believed, at the ſame time that the ſacred hiſtorians are rejected, may we not ſuſpect, that the latter are rejected merely becauſe they are ſacred, becauſe they condemn and prohibit the vices of the world, and tie men down to the diſagreeable ſtrictneſs of virtue, and the hated obſervance of duty?—The Author of the Chriſtian revelation, we may obſerve, does not mean to force us into the poſſeſſion of happineſs by irreſiſtible compulſion or neceſſity, but has appointed it to be the conſequence and the reward of duty and virtue.

The evidences, therefore, of religion, are ſufficient to perſuade, but not to compel us to a reception of divine truth. They are proper to produce conviction in the wiſe and good, but leave to others a power of reſiſting them: they are plain, clear, and ſatisfactory to the honeſt and ſincere inquirer; but yet ſhine not with a light incapable of being withſtood by thoſe *who love darkneſs rather than light*. It is not then the want of evidence

evidence to which Infidelity owes its riſe and progreſs, but ſome other latent cauſe; and the true one, which men are apt to aſcribe to ſomething without, is probably within themſelves. When a doctrine is diſagreeable to our inclinations, and interferes with ſome favourite but forbidden paſſion, ſome beloved though miſtaken intereſt, we may obſerve in ourſelves an unwillingneſs to acknowledge, and a propenſity to queſtion its truth; it is attended to with reluctance, and diſbelieved with pleaſure. Perſons who, like the rich man's brethren, are intoxicated with the enjoyments of this world, care not to extend their views beyond it: for what ſatisfaction can the proſpect of a future ſtate afford to thoſe who have no hopes in it? This determines them not to yield to the moſt powerful evidence of its truth; but to lay hold on every expedient that may remove it from their minds; and, like perſons averſe to a diſagreeable object, to ſhun its appearance in every light.

If God ſhould, in condeſcenſion to our requeſts, diſpatch a meſſenger from the dead, to certify us of our future exiſtence, and of the conſequences of our actions; ſuch a meſſage would doubtleſs greatly aſtoniſh and terrify us into ſome immediate reſolutions of preventing our danger, but it is not certain that it would create an entire reformation in our conduct. Though it might command our preſent attention; yet might it not (like the miracles of Moſes and Pharaoh) fail of producing any laſting effect? When the ſurpriſe ſhould ceaſe, and our fears were removed, we ſhould be apt to attribute it to ſome illuſion or imagery of a diſordered fancy; and the return of our paſſions would diſpoſe us to forget, and by degrees weaken and wear out the impreſſion; and thus diſbelieving by little and little, we ſhould gradually relapſe into our former infidelity and follies.

Inſtances are not wanting to convince us of this. The caſe of perſons in a violent fit of ſickneſs, and in their own apprehenſions juſt departing to mingle with the dead, and afterwards returning to the world and to their vices again, is far from being uncommon. Such perſons could not be more perſuaded, if a meſſenger had arrived from the dead; nor could they have formed

ſincerer reſolutions to repent and turn to GOD, if he would mercifully pleaſe to ſpare them. GOD is merciful, and ſpares; and by degrees this awful ſeaſon vaniſhes, and with it all their convictions and reſolutions of obedience.

To conclude: Good men have no need of any ſupplemental evidence, nor of a continued ſeries of miracles to be repeated before their eyes; for they are convinced without them: and to bad men they would be of fatal conſequence; for they, even with them, would not believe. The favour of miracles to men of corrupt hearts would ſerve only to render them more inexcuſeable; would aggravate their guilt, and add to their condemnation.

Let us then take care that we be not ſeduced by the deceitfulneſs of ſin, and that vice hang no fatal bias upon our minds: for when religion oppoſes us, we are apt to oppoſe religion; to call in queſtion its evidences; to lay aſide the authority of Scripture, and follow what is called the guidance of Nature; to look upon virtue, perhaps, as an empty name, or a fiction of the brain; and thus, under the maſk of thinking freely, to gratify our taſte in living licentiouſly. Let us, on the contrary, become lovers of truth and virtue, and we ſhall be ſecure from any fatal error: if we have an honeſt and ſincere diſpoſition to do the will of GOD, we ſhall know that the doctrineof the Scriptures is from him. Inſtead, then, of requiring any further evidences which we have not, let us make a religious improvement of thoſe we have, by reflecting, that ſoon we muſt either be conſigned to the ſame place of torment with thoſe who have lived and died like the rich man, or with Lazarus be conducted by angels into manſions of endleſs bliſs. This life is introductory to another; and the chief, in a manner the only, value of this world, conſiſts in the opportunity it offers of ſecuring an heavenly inheritance. Let us then keep our eye habitually fixed upon our future ſcene of exiſtence; let us ſuffer no ſeducements to divert our attention from the great end of our being; and let us make it our chief and conſtant aim to be good and virtuous, to render ourſelves faithful diſciples of CHRIST, children of GOD, and heirs of eternal glory.

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SERMON IV.

Againſt Scoffing at RELIGION.

PROV. xiv. 9.

Fools make a mock at ſin.

IN theſe words, Solomon brands with the imputation of folly, a practice which men are apt to run into from an affectation of wiſdom. But perhaps no age has been more fruitful in examples of this ſpecies of folly, than the preſent. No age has ſeen the principles of religion, the diſtinctions of good and evil, the obligations of virtue, and the certainty of a future exiſtence, ſet in a clearer and ſtronger light, or treated with greater ridicule and contempt. In no age have the doctrines of the Chriſtian faith been more carefully ſtudied, more freely debated, or more unanſwerably defended. But as true knowledge has gained ground, the number of thoſe who, without labour or accompliſhments, would acquire the reputation of knowledge, has increaſed likewiſe; who think they then give the ſtrongeſt and eaſieſt proof of ſuperior penetration and diſtinguiſhed parts, when they treat with mirthful ſcorn thoſe truths which others acknowledge and revere. Some join in the ſame practice from a different motive, from a libertine diſpoſition of mind, which prompts men to cry down religion, when they want to break its bonds aſunder, and to get looſe from its reſtraints. They who in their conduct pay no regard to the obligations of religion, think it their intereſt that no ſuch obligations ſhould exiſt. To ſuch men the laws of religion are chains and fetters. Religion oppoſes their paſſions, vices, and corruptions; and they oppoſe its principles and doctrines. But as the cauſe of vice and libertiniſm cannot be vindicated, nor that of religion and virtue ſuffer, by ſerious argumentation; they find it neceſſary to attack the one, and defend the other, by the arts of ridicule, the beſt friend of a bad cauſe, and to ſupply the place of reaſoning with profane contempt.

I ſhall at preſent obſerve how unreaſonable is the conduct of thoſe who mock or ridicule the doctrines or duties of religion.

And, 1*ſt*, Let us inquire into the nature and genius of our religion; and examine, whether its principles, its doctrines and precepts, are the proper objects of reproach; or whether they are not ſuch as the common reaſon of mankind muſt ever juſtify and approve.

The Chriſtian religion teaches us, That there is a ſupreme, eternal, and infinite Being, who created the world, and ſuperintends it by his providence: that he preſides over all nature; is in a particular manner governor of the intellectual and moral world; and has given laws to us his rational creatures, to which he requires our obedience; and will approve and reward, or condemn and puniſh, according to our obſervance or violation of them: that when vice and ſuperſtition had prevailed among all nations, and introduced a total degeneracy and an univerſal corruption of manners, GOD ſent into the world a perſon under the high character of its *Saviour*, with clear evidences of a divine authority, to recal mankind, by his inſtructions and example, into the ways of virtue; to lead them into the practice of whatever can reform, rectify, and refine human nature; to elevate it to its higheſt perfection, and conduct us to the neareſt approach to that infinitely glorious Being, who is the original and ſtandard of all excellence; and thus to lay the ſure foundation of both the preſent and future felicity of mankind.

Whoever looks into the goſpel, muſt ſee, that its great aim and deſign is the reformation and happineſs of human nature. It recommends and enjoins all the duties of piety towards GOD, an awful veneration of his majeſty, humble gratitude for his mercies, perfect reſignation to his will, a firm confidence in his goodneſs, and the conſtant imitation of him in all the virtues of a good life. It requires an inviolable obſervance of all the duties ſuited to the ſocial condition of men; of juſtice, fidelity, integrity of manners, and univerſal benevolence. It lays down ſuch rules for our moral conduct, as are in their nature adapted to ſecure and promote reputation, health, proſperity, private peace of mind,

mind, and public eſteem. It particularly inſiſts upon thoſe virtues and duties which regard the order, ſafety, and welfare of ſociety: forbidding the indulgence of any private gratifications that may be injurious or detrimental to others: requiring all to fulfil the duties of their reſpective ſtations; to employ their talents in honeſt labours, or public ſervices; to be juſt and merciful in diſpoſition and in practice; to cultivate humane and friendly affections: not to limit our good-will or kind offices within the narrow bounds of a neighbourhood, a ſect, or party; but to widen the ſphere of our benevolence, to extend it to all ranks and denominations, and to conſider every man as our neighbour and our brother.

To the rectitude of theſe precepts of religion our conſcience and judgment cannot but ſubſcribe. They are manifeſtly calculated to promote both private and ſocial virtue; and, conſequently, to advance what is naturally connected with them, the peace and happineſs of every individual, and the public ſecurity and welfare of every community.

It may be urged, that the Chriſtian ſyſtem contains other particulars beſides thoſe moral precepts;—ſuch as certain doctrines, which the light of nature could not, or but imperfectly, diſcover; and alſo, certain inſtituted rites of external religion. But ſtill the great object of the Author of Chriſtianity was, the eſtabliſhment of moral virtue; and all its doctrines and its rites are plainly ſubſervient to this great end, and have a moral influence and tendency, without which they are declared to be of no ſignificance. We are aſſured that it will be in vain to plead hereafter, before our heavenly Judge, that we have aſſented to his doctrines, and complied with his external inſtitutions, if we have not lived up to the end and deſign of them: he will not upon theſe terms accept, but reject us as workers of iniquity.

What is there, then, in this abſtract of religion, unbeſeeming the wiſdom of God, or ill-adapted to the nature and neceſſities of men? What is there that is not a moſt reaſonable ſervice, ſuited to our beſt notions of the Deity, and conducive to the higheſt perfection and happineſs of mankind? It has indeed been the

the fate of the Chriſtian inſtitution, to have been often miſapprehended; as is evident from the multiplicity of ſects that have appeared in different periods and parts of the world. It has been often miſrepreſented by the artful attempts of its oppoſers, and not ſeldom perhaps in the miſtaken defences of its friends. Under the pretended ſanction of religion, incredible doctrines have been impoſed, and the moſt immoral practices authorized. With this venerable name, the ſuperſtitious ſanctify their follies, and the enthuſiaſt conſecrates his conceits. Some ſeem to place all religion in an inflexible adherence to opinions merely ſpeculative: others adopt abſurd practical errors; ſome expreſſing their love of GOD, by hating and perſecuting their brethren, and, from miſtaken notions of religion, purſuing practices which religion was meant to reform and ſuppreſs. But it were an endleſs and ungrateful labour to enumerate all the corruptions of Religion which have diſhonoured that ſacred name, and expoſed it to the inſults of thoſe who either have not diſcernment or inclination to diſtinguiſh true religion from the various miſrepreſentations of it. But when we view religion in a juſt light; when we ſee its native form, its genuine features, without the dreſs of either ſuperſtition or enthuſiaſm: it will appear, like its great Author, in perfect beauty, the object of univerſal veneration.

2*dly*, But further to evidence the unreaſonableneſs of this practice of ſcoffing at religion, let us conſider its conſequences to ſociety.

That the peace, happineſs, and proſperity of any community, are derived from the general obſervance of the duties of religion, of fidelity, juſtice, benevolence, and other private and ſocial virtues; that theſe render a people happy and ſecure; and that the contrary vices are the ſources of public diſorder and ruin —is a truth which comes to us confirmed by the wiſdom of all ages, and the experience of all hiſtories. This truth even the adverſaries of religion acknowledge, when they aſſert it to be only a political engine, framed for the ſecurity and good government of ſociety. If theſe virtues, then, are admitted to be neceſſary and eſſential to the happineſs of ſociety, religion muſt alſo be neceſſary;

neceſſary; for no other principle can lay us under an equal obligation to the obſervance of them, or equally reſtrain from the oppoſite vices. Human laws, unſupported by religion, would loſe, in a great meaſure, their force and authority, and be utterly unable to preſerve public order and peace: For if obedience to thoſe laws be derived from no higher principle than the fear of human juſtice; then, whoever thinks himſelf ſecret enough to eſcape, artful enough to elude, or powerful enough to contend with it, can be under no reſtraint from any act of fraud, violence or iniquity that ungoverned inclination may ſuggeſt. Every day furniſhes freſh examples of the little regard paid to human laws, where the violation of them is ſuppoſed to be no offence againſt religion. Whereas, if men are governed by principles of conſcience; if they act under the awe of a ſuperior juſtice; if they conſider the laws of religion as the laws of an Almighty Being, who will infinitely reward the obſervance, or puniſh the violation, of them; whom no artifice can deceive, and no power oppoſe;—ſuch conſiderations muſt ſuggeſt the moſt effectual incitements to virtue; muſt influence not only our manners but our inclinations; and not only regulate our outward deportment, but reach the heart, and purify that ſource and ſpring of our actions.

But, on the other hand, take away the reſtraints of religion, and the torrent of public iniquity would ſoon extend far beyond its uſual channel, would break down the fences of human laws, and ſpread deſolation around. And nothing can more effectually contribute to this overflowing of ungodlineſs, than ſcoffing at Religion, treating it as an object of pleaſantry, and ridiculing its obligations. This is acting up to the folly of him deſcribed by Solomon, who ſcatters arrows, firebrands, and death; and ſays, "Am I not in ſport?" Should it ever obtain as a faſhion to repreſent religion as a matter merely political; to reſolve the diſtinctions of good and evil into political contrivance only; to conſider a future life as a viſionary ſcene; and to paint ſin in ſuch inviting colours, as to hide its infamy and guilt;—we ſhall ſee it no longer fly to covert and retirement; impiety ſhall

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lift up its head with open inſolence; the ſinner be no longer concerned to veil his guilt; and even the good man may be tempted to quit a virtuous ſingularity, and yield to the prevailing ſtream. Should ſuch a ſpirit of profaneneſs go out into the world, and a contempt of conſcience and duty become a faſhionable principle of action, and vice in its various ſhapes be purſued without ſhame or cenſure, the moſt fatal conſequences to ſociety muſt inevitably enſue. To ſcoff at the laws of religion, then, is to revile what we ought to reverence, and to ſport where the wiſe and good would be inclined to mourn.

Let us, in the *next* place, examine whether the irreligious ſcoffer acts with any reaſonable views of perſonal advantage. He may poſſibly enjoy the vanity of diſplaying a genius, or acquiring a name: but certain it is, that no eaſe or comfort of mind can be derived from irreligious principles; and that he who forms his conduct by the dictates of religion and conſcience, takes the method that bids faireſt for happineſs even in this world. But if we take the next into conſideration, it will appear beyond contradiction, that the fear of the LORD only is wiſdom, and to depart from evil is underſtanding. The hardieſt infidel pretends not to prove the impoſſibility of our future exiſtence: the conſequent poſſibility, therefore, of a ſtate of retribution, demonſtrates the folly of the profane ſcoffer. Should we even admit (what indeed cannot be admitted) that the evidences for and againſt a future ſtate are equal, and that the arguments on both ſides balance each other; yet the danger is infinitely diſproportionate and unequal. If there be no regions that lie beyond the grave, no future tribunal to which we ſhall be ſummoned; if we are to loſe our exiſtence in death, and become as if we had never been;—then the caſe of the righteous and wicked will be alike, and they ſhall both lie down undiſtinguiſhed in equal inſenſibility. But if there be another ſcene in which we are to appear again, and live for ever; if there is a GOD, who will judge the world; if there will be a day when men ſhall riſe again, and give an account of their works; how widely different then will be their condition? Where then

then will the ungodly and the ſinner appear? May not the profane ſcoffer then expect to be rejected by that great and good Being whom he had before renounced, and to feel the reſentment of that power he had often deſpiſed? The danger, then, on the ſide of religion and virtue, is nothing; but on that of vice, it is infinite.

From theſe reflections it may appear, that we ought not to entertain leſs reverence for religion, becauſe ſome are hardy enough, by unfair repreſentations and falſe colouring, to endeavour to expoſe it to mockery and contempt.

Far, far from us be the practice of thoſe who thus ſport with the honour of their Maker, the happineſs of their fellow creatures, and their own ſalvation. Let us rather unite with the friends of religion, to protect the moſt venerable name, and ſupport the beſt cauſe in the world; let us not fail in our duty to a religion which fair inquiry will convince us came down from heaven, and is of divine extraction; let us live under a conſtant ſenſe of a ſuperior Being inſpecting and preſiding over us; let us remember, that they that honour him, he will honour; let us, in our whole conduct, preſerve the moſt awful regard for him and his laws, however traduced and vilified by the licentious and profane:—then may we hope, that we ſhall hereafter be numbered with the children of GOD; and that our lot will be among the ſaints in heaven.

SERMON V.

On MYSTERIES in RELIGION.

Preached on TRINITY-SUNDAY.

2 PET. iii. 16.

——*In which are ſome things hard to be underſtood.*

WHAT is in the text aſſerted of the epiſtles of St. Paul, is in ſome meaſure applicable to other parts of the ſacred writings. For though, in points eſſential to ſalvation, the ſcripture ſpeaks in the moſt intelligible language, and the rules of life it lays down are clear and perſpicuous, *a lantern to our feet, and a light unto our paths*; yet it is not to be diſſembled, that the ſcripture has its obſcurities, its myſterious doctrines, which neceſſarily ariſe from the ſublimity of the ſubjects, and the limitation of human capacities. A revelation which delivers doctrines relative to the nature, counſels, and attributes, of that Supreme Being who inhabits immenſity, muſt contain matters too high, too elevated, to be clearly diſcerned by human underſtanding. When, therefore, a ſyſtem of religion comes recommended to us under the character of a Divine Revelation, if it is ſupported by all the external evidence that the nature of revelation will admit, and if the internal excellence and purity of its moral precepts and inſtructions are worthy of a divine original, we ought not to reject any of its doctrines on account of their being hard to be underſtood, until we have firſt conſidered and examined them with that attention which the importance of the ſubject demands, and with that humility and diffidence which become creatures of an imperfect and limited underſtanding.

There are many things which do not oppoſe reaſon, yet are far above its ability to comprehend. The weakneſs of human reaſon obliges us to ſubmit to the acknowledgement of this general truth; and yet, in the application

cation of it to particular inſtances, the pride of reaſon inclines us to diſown it. We cannot but be ſenſible of the defects of our rational powers, and the ſcantineſs of our knowledge; and yet we vainly endeavour to *find out the Almighty to perfection.* We are weak enough to meaſure his nature by our own; and where *his ways are not as our ways,* we are apt to think them *unequal*; and where his revelation is not adapted to our reaſon, we ſuppoſe it to be erroneous.

I ſhall at preſent obſerve, 1*ſt*, That the difficulty of apprehending ſome myſterious doctrines of the Chriſtian faith, is no argument againſt the credibility of them; and, 2*dly*, That the moral doctrines of the holy Scriptures, which we are moſt concerned to know, are revealed and propoſed to us with plainneſs and perſpicuity.

As the Chriſtian revelation comes to us confirmed by the evidence of miracles, propheſies, and all the external circumſtances of credibility that can be required; and as the internal excellence of its moral precepts is every way worthy of the Divine Being; in this caſe, though it contains ſome doctrines too ſublime for our apprehenſion, yet this is not a ſufficient ground for rejecting them. For, notwithſtanding all the pretended ſufficiency, all the boaſted powers of human reaſon, what is there that our limited intellect can fully comprehend? What can we attain by the moſt attentive and unwearied purſuit of knowledge, but to diſcover how little can be known? Human reaſon, however enlarged, has its bounds which it cannot paſs; and beyond its wideſt and moſt extended view, there lie an infinity of objects which its eye cannot reach. And even within the circle of its knowledge, it has but an imperfect diſcernment: it ſees only the ſurface as it were of things, but cannot penetrate into their interior powers and principles. Even in thoſe works of nature where our knowledge is moſt perfect, even there we muſt be ſenſible of its imperfection; in theſe there are ſome ſubtle intricacies which we cannot unravel, there is always a depth we can never fathom. We can only gueſs a little, underſtand leſs, but completely comprehend nothing. Every thing within or without us may remind us of the limitation of our underſtanding. The whole creation abounds with myſte-

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ries; and the moſt common and familiar objects, the moſt contemptible worm or weed that we tread under our feet, if we attempt to inveſtigate their ſecret qualities, will preſent obſtacles not to be ſurmounted by the ableſt inquirers, as intricate and myſterious as any article of faith.

If, then, we underſtand not earthly, how ſhall we underſtand heavenly things? If we cannot fully comprehend the material world, or the moſt familiar objects of ſenſe, muſt not the knowledge of ſpiritual beings, of objects which lie remote from the obſervation of our ſenſes, be confeſſed to be too wonderful and excellent for us? If every part of nature is big with wonders impenetrable to our reaſon, why ſhould we expect, that revelation, which proceeds from the ſame Author of nature, ſhould be entirely exempt from them!

Let it alſo be obſerved, that myſterious doctrines are ſuch only with relation to our underſtanding: that many propoſitions in the ſciences, for inſtance, may appear unintelligible to one perſon, and yet may be familiar to another; and, for the ſame reaſon, many doctrines which are above the capacity of human underſtanding, may yet lie level and obvious to intelligences of an order ſuperior to man: that as many things ſeem hard to be underſtood by us in a ſtate of infancy, which yet are evident to our riper years and maturer judgment; ſo alſo in a future life, when our ſpirits will be made perfect, we may have the cleareſt diſcernment of ſome truths, which, in our preſent ſtate of minority, ſeem involved in the deepeſt darkneſs. All creatures are infinite in their nature, and circumſcribed in their capacities; and conſequently an infinity of truths may be known to the ſupreme all-perfect Mind, which the moſt perfect created underſtanding may never be able to conceive. To aſſert, then, that our inability to apprehend myſteries, is an argument againſt their truth, is to ſuppoſe in us a capacity of apprehending all truth: it is to make ourſelves equal with God; and, in effect, to aſſert that our underſtanding is infinite like his. Whereas to us, indeed, all nature is full of myſteries: but to Him nothing

thing in nature can be myſterious; to his eye all things are equally clear; and all things lie naked before him, without any veil, without any darkneſs or obſcurity.

We may have the cleareſt evidence of the certainty of ſome truths, which yet may appear inexplicable, may be interwoven and entangled with difficulties which we can never unfold. Thus, with regard to the doctrine of the holy Trinity, the ſcripture aſſures us, that GOD has an only Son, who for our redemption came down from heaven; that he has an Holy Spirit, who inſpired the apoſtles, and is aſſiſting to good men in the work of their ſalvation. Thus far the ſcripture has clearly informed us: but in what manner the Son and Holy Spirit are one with the Father; how they were derived from him, or are united to him; has not been revealed, and is too myſterious for our apprehenſion.

The caſe is the ſame in many other certain unconteſted truths. It is acknowledged, *e. g.* that this world, this globe of earth which we inhabit, has not exiſted from eternity; that it is not an underived, ſelf-exiſtent being, but was created and formed by an Almighty Agent. But the manner of its birth, by what art it could be brought forth, by what wiſdom or power produced from nonentity into exiſtence, is by us, and perhaps by all created beings, utterly inconceivable. So alſo of our own exiſtence, of the vital union of the ſoul and body, we cannot doubt; but who can explain what is the ſpring of life, or the principle of motion and activity within us? Who can ſay, by what ties and ligaments ſpirit and matter are conjoined, or by what contact a material and an immaterial ſubſtance can reciprocally act upon each other? If, then, we are a myſtery to ourſelves, if our own nature is concealed from us, no wonder that we cannot by ſearching find out the Almighty to perfection; no wonder that doctrines relative to that Being whom heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain ſhould appear myſterious and incomprehenſible to our limited capacities; no wonder that HE who infinitely tranſcends our nature, ſhould infinitely tranſcend our conceptions of him; and that many truths reſpecting his being, providence, and attributes,

tributes, ſhould like himſelf, dwell in a light, which no man can approach, inacceſſible to human underſtanding.

Let it be further obſerved, that we have no right to a revelation, and have no claim, conſequently, to any further information than the Divine Wiſdom may think fit to communicate. For what GOD has revealed, we have reaſon to be thankful; for what he has with-held, we have no right to remonſtrate. Whatever revelation he is pleaſed to impart, is the effect of his goodneſs; and it is as conſiſtent with this attribute, not to reveal to us at preſent all myſteries, and all knowledge, as it is not to communicate all the felicity our nature is capable of receiving. GOD, queſtionleſs, for the beſt and wiſeſt reaſons, has given us an imperfect view of things, and afforded ſufficient evidence of ſome doctrines; and yet hath with-held the light neceſſary to clear up all the difficulties and obſcurities that ſurround them. Theſe reaſons may not appear to us, as the Supreme Being is under no obligation to accommodate all his ways and thoughts to our capacities, and to confine himſelf within the ſphere of our underſtanding. In a future ſtate, we hope to have a more ample portion of knowledge communicated to us, and much clearer and more extenſive proſpects. And in that ſtate we may hope to go on in a perpetual progreſs towards ſupreme perfection, and be for ever making gradual advances in knowledge, in wiſdom, and in happineſs. In the mean time, whilſt we are travelling to thoſe regions of happineſs and wiſdom, let us be content to purſue the directions of that light which the Father of lights has held out to us; which is ſufficient to be a *lantern unto our feet*, and to guide them into the way of peace; though not bright enough to give us a clear diſcernment of every thing we would wiſh to know.

The Chriſtian revelation was not meant to furniſh matter for the inquiries of ſpeculation, not meant to gratify the vanity of worldly wiſdom; but to lay down a plan of moral conduct, to direct our practice, to form our manners, and to mend the heart. The Divine Being has neither by reaſon nor revelation favoured us with the ſame information concerning his nature or providence,

vidence, as concerning our duty. In the duties of life we are ſufficiently inſtructed; we know enough to regulate our morals and make us wiſe unto ſalvation.

Which leads me to obſerve, *2dly*, That the doctrines of the holy ſcriptures which we are moſt concerned to know, are revealed and propoſed to us with plainneſs and perſpicuity.

As our bleſſed Lord came into the world to reveal all neceſſary truth, and was pleaſed to have his doctrine tranſmitted to ſucceeding ages in writings which were to be the rule of faith and manners, it was agreeable to his wiſdom to appoint thoſe writings to be delivered with diſtinctneſs and perſpicuity; and nothing ſeems more inconſiſtent with the divine goodneſs and wiſdom, than to ſuppoſe, that by his appointment they are written with ſuch obſcurity as to be intelligible only to a few. *If our goſpel be hid*, ſays St. Paul, *it is hid to them that are loſt; in whom the god of this world has blinded the minds of them that believe not, leſt the light of the glorious goſpel of Chriſt ſhould ſhine unto them.* As religion is the equal concern of all, and men of very unequal capacities are under an equal obligation to find out the way of life, it will follow, that to acquire the knowledge of all that is neceſſary to ſalvation, cannot be a matter of ſubtle and difficult ſpeculation, but only of integrity and ſincere inquiry. And certain it is, that, let our capacities be ever ſo different, if we attend to the ſcripture with an honeſt heart, determined to obey its plain precepts, and to believe its doctrines as far as they are underſtood by us, we then follow a ſafe and infallible guide, who will either conduct us unto all truth, or at leaſt ſecure us from all errors that might be fatal to our ſalvation. As religion is neceſſary to the happineſs of all, the knowledge of it muſt be attainable by all, in an honeſt and diligent uſe of the intellectual powers which God has given them, and of the light which his providence affords for their information. And accordingly we find the chief principles, the fundamental doctrines of the goſpel, appear in it with clear and irreſiſtible evidence. Such are the doctrines concerning the being and providence of God; concerning the neceſſity of repentance, and obedience to his commands;

concerning the certainty of a life to come, and of a future judgment; concerning our bleſſed Lord as the Saviour and Judge of mankind. In ſhort, the knowledge of religion, ſo much at leaſt as is neceſſary, is, we may be aſſured, always within the reach of an honeſt mind.

Too diligent we can never indeed be in our inquiries into thoſe parts of ſcripture which may form our morals, and impreſs the mind with worthy conceptions of the Supreme Being, or benevolent affections to our fellow-creatures. To meditate on the law of GOD in ſuch a manner as to be thereby prevailed on to conform our hearts and lives to the rules it preſcribes, is an employment moſt worthy of man, and moſt acceptable to GOD; and will always be productive of preſent ſatisfaction, and future felicity. But it is not neceſſary to underſtand thoſe things which are hard to be underſtood: It is not needful that thoſe truths ſhould be diſtinctly apprehended by us which we have not abilities to apprehend; or that the eye of reaſon ſhould diſcern thoſe objects which the Author of reaſon has placed far above out of its ſight. Our merciful Creator has conſulted the health of our ſouls in his revelation, in the ſame manner as he has provided for the ſubſiſtence of our bodies in the conſtitution of nature, by appointing what is moſt needful and ſalutary to be moſt obvious and common; whilſt what would only ſerve to gratify curioſity or taſte, lies more remote, and is not to be acquired without more difficult and painful reſearches.

Let us then chiefly attend to what GOD has moſt clearly revealed. In the precepts of Chriſtianity there is not even the ſhadow of a myſtery. Nothing is more clear in ſcripture than the commandments of GOD; nothing more myſterious, than his nature and eſſence. Where he has thrown a veil over his nature, we muſt neceſſarily continue ignorant, or be humbly content to ſee darkly. But we know what is enough for us to know, that it is our duty, and will be our happineſs, to love, adore, imitate, and obey, that infinite, unknown, yet well-known Being, the immenſity of whoſe perfections the ſpan of reaſon can never meaſure; whoſe excellencies we can never ſpeak of without detracting from

from them; who is infinitely above what we are, infinitely above what we can think: that we ought therefore to make up in veneration what we want in knowledge, and with all the powers of our ſoul to adore and praiſe him who is above all praiſe, and to aſcribe to him, as is moſt due, all honour and adoration.

SERMON VI.

Parable of the TALENTS.

LUKE xix. 16,—19.

Then came the firſt, ſaying, Lord, thy pound hath gained ten pounds. And he ſaid unto him, Well, thou good ſervant: becauſe thou haſt been faithful in a very little, have thou authority over ten cities. And the ſecond came, ſaying, Lord, thy pound hath gained five pounds. And he ſaid likewiſe to him, Be thou alſo over five cities.

THE parable from which theſe words are taken, inſtructs us to conſider the Supreme Being as lord and proprietor of the world, and ourſelves as his ſervants or ſtewards, to whom he has diſtributed ſuch talents, ſuch powers, poſſeſſions, or endowments, as may fit and qualify us for the various ſtations and duties to which his providence appoints us. Theſe are committed to us in the nature of a truſt, for the management of which we muſt account to the donor. If we acquit ourſelves with fidelity and diligence in this probationary employment, we ſhall be entitled to far greater expreſſions of his regard: but if we ſquander our Lord's goods; if we are waſteful, or even negligent; if we are unfaithful, or even unprofitable ſervants, we

may expect to become the objects of his diſpleaſure, or, in the language of the parable, be caſt into utter darkneſs, where will be weeping and gnaſhing of teeth.

The poſſeſſions of this world we erroneouſly call our own. We hold them only in truſt, and under certain reſervations, ſo as to be accountable for the diſpoſal of them. The property of them, ſtrictly ſpeaking, is ſo far from being veſted in us, that we have no certain term in them, and are removeable at the will of our Lord. Even the produce of them is not ſo far ours, that we may uſe or abuſe it at pleaſure; but for this alſo we ſtand accountable. And we are informed, there will be a time when our LORD will come and reckon with his ſervants, and a ſtrict account will be demanded of whatever has been intruſted to our care. He has himſelf aſſured us, that the examination will turn upon the manner in which his ſervants have employed the talents delivered to them; and they who have not faithfully diſcharged their duty in this article, ſhall be conſidered as betrayers of their truſt, ſhall forfeit all claim to the favour of their LORD, and incur the puniſhment due to their negligence or injuſtice.

The day of inquiry, indeed, may be very diſtant. This world is appointed to be our ſtate of probation; nor will our account be called for, till it ſhall be no more. Many years may roll on, many ages may intervene, before the laſt awful day of reckoning come; but come it moſt aſſuredly will, and be deciſive of our everlaſting fate.

In the parable from whence my text is taken, our LORD, under the ſimilitude of a man travelling into a far country, allots to his ſervants different rewards, proportioned to their reſpective improvement of the talents delivered to them. The good ſervant whoſe pound had gained ten pounds, received this approbation and recompenſe: *Well done, thou good ſervant; becauſe thou haſt been faithful in a very little, have thou authority over ten cities. And when the ſecond came, ſaying, Lord, thy pound hath gained five pounds, he ſaid likewiſe to him, Be thou alſo over five cities.*

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In this parable a diſtinction is made between the two ſervants, who were each of them diligent and faithful; but to the ſuperior diligence of the one a reward proportionably greater was aſſigned. The moral of this well-known parable is evidently meant to excite attention to the duties of religion; to animate us to a continual perſeverance and progreſs in piety and goodneſs; to inform us, that our future rewards in heaven will be proportioned to our religious diligence upon earth; that no good action will be loſt; that every virtue, and every degree of virtue, ſhall have its reward; and that ſuperior aſſiduity in the duties of religion, will be recompenſed with an ampler portion of happineſs.

In order to invite your compliance with this intention of the parable, and to recommend a continual progreſſion and improvement in goodneſs, let it be in the firſt place conſidered, that ſuch improvement and progreſſion are abſolutely neceſſary even to our ſecurity. We are no where informed, and cannot conſequently determine, what is the loweſt degree of goodneſs God will accept; or what exact quantity of good works, what preciſe meaſure of obedience, may juſt ſuffice to inſure our ſalvation.

It concerns us, therefore, to take heed that we do not deceive ourſelves, by a too parſimonious obedience, by a too penurious diſcharge of our duty; ſince a miſtaken frugality in this point, or a too partial eſtimate of our performances, may be fatal, and for ever deprive us of a future reward. If we are remiſs, and fall ſhort of our duty, the proſpect before us is too dreadful for deſcription. Whereas, on the other hand, if we ſhould exceed what we may apprehend to be the ſtrict meaſure of obedience; if we ſhould labour more abundantly in duty than may be abſolutely neceſſary to ſalvation: what will be the conſequence? Will our pious labours profit us nothing? Have we cleanſed our hearts in vain? Have our hours of virtue been miſemployed and loſt? No; whatſoever a man ſoweth, that ſhall he alſo reap. If we ſow bountifully, we ſhall reap alſo bountifully. Our future harveſt will be proportioned to the moral culture of our minds. Every virtuous improvement will turn to account; not a ſingle good action can be unprofitable

to the agent, whatever it may be to others: not even a good intention ſhall loſe its reward.

The happineſs of heaven is ſo ineſtimable, that we cannot be at too much pains to ſecure ſo great a prize; we cannot be too ſolicitous to run the ſhort race of life ſo as to obtain it. We cannot be too careful leſt the deluſion of ſecurity ſhould tempt us to loiter and abate our ſpeed, and thus diſappoint our hopes for ever. Our hearts are ſometimes fallacious monitors, and make too partial reports of our progreſs and proficiency in virtue; and it is eaſy to be deceived into too favourable ſentiments of our own worth and goodneſs, if we give ear to the ſuggeſtions of ſelf-love, and to the prejudices we naturally form in our own favour.

To guard againſt this ſelf-deception, and the fatal conſequences attending it, and to make our calling and election ſure, we muſt take care not to grow weary in well-doing; not to ſtand ſtill or loſe ground; but to go on from virtue to virtue, to put forth all our ſtrength, and exert all our powers, in preſſing forward to the mark for the *prize of our high calling*. Never muſt we fix to ourſelves bounds which we are not to paſs, never ſtop ſhort in our progreſs towards perfection. For, notwithſtanding all our attention and labour, never can we come up to that ſtandard of perfection at which we ſhould conſtantly aim. Never can we make ſo great a progreſs in goodneſs, but we may ſtill go farther. He who has got the fartheſt, is ſtill ſhort of what he might attain to. He who thinks it unneceſſary to be better than he is, is, we may be aſſured, not ſo good as he ought to be. A religious ſtate ſhould be always progreſſive; and is in ſcripture compared to ſome vegetable productions, which, ſmall and contracted at firſt, gradually unfold themſelves, and advance to their appointed maturity and perfection.

But virtue, though capable of perpetual growth, will not grow at all without conſtant culture. As acquiſitions in ſcience are not to be preſerved, much leſs improved, without attention, induſtry, and a due cultivation of our minds; the ſame may be obſerved of moral or religious attainments: they cannot continue long at one ſtay; if they are not exerted, they will be diminiſhed and impaired;

paired; like the talent taken from the ſlothful ſervant, if they are not improved, they will be loſt.

But a further conſideration to be attended to is, that by a continued progreſſion and advancement in religion and virtue, we not only conſult our ſecurity, but we directly add to the meaſure of our happineſs. Virtue has a natural tendency to felicitate the mind; and yields the trueſt and pureſt enjoyment, partly in this world, and much more in the next. Our happineſs, as far as it is in our own power, depends, through every ſtage of our being, on wiſdom and moral goodneſs. Theſe are the moſt valuable treaſures; Heaven's choiceſt, beſt gifts. If we poſſeſs theſe, we are to a certain degree in poſſeſſion of happineſs. If we abound in them, we are rich in the nobleſt ſenſe. Theſe far exceed, in intrinſic value, all that the world has to offer.

Would we then approach to the higheſt happineſs of our nature? Let us walk in the paths of virtue which lead to it. Every ſtep of our progreſs will conduct us nearer to it, and open to our view ſome new ſcene of enjoyment.

But, beſides the enjoyment reſulting from the nature of virtue, the Judge of the whole earth has informed us, that he will hereafter aſſign different allotments of happineſs to us in proportion to the meaſure of our virtue, and the improvement of our talents. That God ſhould allot different meaſures of his favour and bounty to his creatures in proportion to their reſpective moral improvement, is perfectly conſonant to juſtice, reaſon, and equity. For though human frailty can have no claim of right to an eternity of happineſs; though the loweſt place in heaven is far above the merits of the pureſt ſaint; yet whatever motive induces the divine Being to reward the obedience of his creatures, the ſame will prevail with him to adjuſt our reward to our obedience, and to obſerve a proportion in the allotments of his bounty. Is virtue a proper object of his approbation and regard? Superior virtue may then expect an ampler portion of favour. Our Saviour accordingly aſſures us, that in his Father's houſe are many manſions. We read of ſome that ſhall be greateſt, ſome that ſhall be leaſt,

in the kingdom of heaven. And the Apoſtle repreſents the bleſſed under theſe diſtinctions, ſhining with various luſtre, as one ſtar differeth from another ſtar in glory.

Whether, then, we conſider the happineſs by nature annexed to virtue, or the rewards conſequent upon it by the appointment of Heaven, certain it is, that none of its labours can fail of a ſuitable recompence, and that the degree of our bliſs will be commenſurate to that of our improvement. And what greater encouragement can we need to animate us to our utmoſt exertions? All the advantages of nature or of fortune, our knowledge, our leiſure, our every ability or opportunity of doing good to others, or of becoming good ourſelves, are to be conſidered as talents entruſted to our management.

Let us then ſometimes call ourſelves to an account, and impartially examine what proficiency we have made in goodneſs; how we have acquitted ourſelves in the duties required from us; whether we have acted up to the powers granted us, of becoming better ourſelves, or of making others happier; how we have employed the portion of wealth, wiſdom, or power, with which we have been intruſted; what uſe we have made of the advantages of our education, fortune, or ſtation; and whether we have endeavoured to promote the wiſe and good ends for which our Maker beſtowed them. If, upon fair enquiry, we find that we have endeavoured to act as good and faithful ſervants, and to improve the talents committed to our charge, we may then with joy expect the coming of our Lord, conſcious of our integrity, and aſſured of his approbation. But on the other hand, what bitter reflections, and what awful fears, muſt this retroſpect create in the mind of the unprofitable ſervant, unprofitable both to himſelf and others, whoſe talent has produced no improvement, has added nothing either to his own virtue, or their happineſs? The parable will inform him of his fate, if his Lord find him thus unfruitful.

And here it muſt be indeed acknowledged, that this is in a greater or leſs degree the condition of us all. For who among us can ſay that we have no ſin? that we have not left undone things that we ought to have done? Which of us has improved every gift of heaven to its utmoſt

utmoſt extent? or if we have been faithful in ſome talents, have we not miſemployed or been neglectful of others? The beſt, when our LORD comes to reckon with us, will have much to be forgiven; and in that great day of account, we muſt make our laſt appeal, not to the merit of our ſervice, but to the mercy of our Judge.

But let it be obſerved, that if, according to the parable, utter darkneſs is to be the portion of him who lays by his talent unimproved, yet has preſerved it unimpaired; what muſt be the ſeverer doom of thoſe who profuſely ſquander it in acts of diſhonour and diſobedience to GOD? Our Saviour has in the parable deſcribed only a crime of omiſſion in neglecting the talent. But how many proceed ſtill farther in guilt; and pervert thoſe gifts which the goodneſs of GOD has conferred on them, into occaſions of offending him? How often may we ſee ſuperior talents and abilities engaged in the intereſt of vice, and unhappily employed in diſobeying and diſhonouring him that gave them? And if the unfruitful ſervant, who was indolent only, or careleſs, was condemned to utter darkneſs, what direful ſentence may we expect will be pronounced upon the aggravated crime of thoſe who have been active, induſtrious, and diligent in vice?

To ſuch ſinners one conſolation indeed yet remains, that to the penitent the gate of mercy is never ſhut; that however multiplied or aggravated their ſins may have been, yet if they are forſaken, and repented of, they will not be the occaſions of their condemnation. They may indeed, and moſt certainly will, diminiſh their future proportion of happineſs, if they are not careful, by ſuperior diligence, to redeem the time they have loſt; to recover their ground, and preſs forward with renewed ſpeed towards the prize.

Let us then conſider what encouragement we have to a continued perſeverance and progreſs in the duties of religion. Let us remember that GOD is able to repay to the uttermoſt thoſe who ſerve him, and that our reward will be proportioned to our obedience. Let our labours in his ſervice be ever ſo long, they can never be in vain; but the ſooner we begin, and the more diligently

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we labour, the more certainly we ſhall obtain a reward, and the more glorious it will be when attained. Let us then preſs forward towards perfection, knowing that our portion will be glory, and honour, and immortality.

And happy, happy ſure, we muſt think the lot of human nature, if the religious attention and induſtry of a few years can purchaſe for us the prize of immortal life; a prize as far above our conception as it is beyond our deſert. Happy ſervants, whom their LORD will thus bountifully reward! Bleſſed ſtewards! if the improvement of the talents entruſted to our care can entitle us to that gracious ſentence: *Well done, good and faithful ſervants: becauſe ye have been faithful in few things, I will make you rulers over many things; enter ye into the joy of your Lord.*

SERMON VII.

The Prayer of AGUR conſidered and explained.

PROV. xxx. 8, 9.

Give me neither poverty nor riches, feed me with food convenient for me: leſt I be full, and deny thee, and ſay, Who is the Lord? or leſt I be poor, and ſteal, and take the name of my God in vain.

THOUGH it is our duty, and ought to be our firſt care, as Chriſtians, and heirs of immortality, to make proviſion for a future life, and to lay up for ourſelves treaſures in heaven; yet reaſon and nature tell us, whilſt we are in the world, that the world muſt be our concern, though not our principal concern; that its innocent enjoyments are good, though not our ſupreme good. We are not to put too literal a conſtruction on thoſe precepts in ſcripture which direct us to take no thought for to-morrow; not to lay up for ourſelves treaſures on earth; not to labour for the meat

meat which periſheth, and the like: which, far from prohibiting all attention to the neceſſary cares of the world, can be underſtood only as admonitions to give our ſupreme eternal intereſts the firſt place in our affections; to let all temporal cares be only of inferior conſideration, and not to ſuffer them to exclude the more important concerns of futurity. The example in the text may direct us to requeſt a moderate portion of the conveniencies of life: *Give me neither poverty nor riches, feed me with food convenient for me: leſt I be full, and deny thee, and ſay, Who is the Lord? or leſt I be poor, and ſteal, and take the name of my God in vain.*

I ſhall, 1*ſt*, conſider the meaning and import of this petition; and, 2*dly*, the dangers and diſadvantages which, in a moral or religious view, attend the two extremes of affluence and indigence which are here deprecated.

The words in the text have ſometimes been ſuppoſed to be a petition for a middle ſtate of life, one equidiſtant from the extremes of poverty and opulence, and leaſt expoſed to the temptations and ſeducements which are peculiar to each. Such a ſituation may perhaps be generally eſteemed moſt eligible, whether we would wiſh to acquire a virtuous or a tranquil ſtate of mind. But the wiſdom of the ſupreme Ruler of the world alone knows what is moſt conducive to the well-being of the general ſyſtem, and to the particular welfare of individuals. He aſſigns our ſtation; it is our duty to conform to it. A middle ſtate of life cannot be a proper ſubject of all mens petitions to Heaven; for human life requires a diſtinction of ſtations. In Society there muſt be ſubordination. It muſt be the province of ſome to preſide and govern, and the duty of others to ſubmit and ſerve: for the political, like the natural body, cannot ſubſiſt without a variety of members, employed in different functions, and offices, mutually dependant, and all co-operating and conſpiring to the preſervation and health of the whole. Whence it follows, that the petition in the text cannot be underſtood to propoſe one fixed ſtandard or meaſure of fortune, as the proper object of every man's deſires, or the proper ſubject of his prayers; but may mean only

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ſuch a competency, ſuch a convenient proportion of temporal ſupplies, as is ſuited to our reſpective ſtations.

And it is a reaſonable requeſt we may all make to God; not that he would place us all in equal rank of life, in which caſe ſociety could not ſubſiſt; but that he would vouchſafe us ſuch a meaſure of temporal good things, as is accommodated to the ſtation we are to fill, and the dependents for which we are to provide.—— Riches, poverty or competence, are relative terms, and cannot be accurately fixed, without reference to our condition or ſituation in the world. What is affluence and abundance in one ſtation of life, may only be a competence, or indigence, in another. The neceſſities and wants of men muſt conſequently vary; not only their imaginary, but their real wants; not only ſuch as, by ambition, avarice, or luxury, they create to themſelves, but ſuch as riſe out of their ſituation and character. He whom his Maker has appointed to the loweſt offices of life, to go forth to his work and to his labour until the evening; doomed, like our firſt parent, in the ſweat of his face to eat his bread; when he petitions heaven to give him the food convenient for him, may mean no more than to aſk the enjoyment of health and ſtrength, and the divine bleſſing upon the labours of his honeſt induſtry. But he to whom birth, or fortune, or more properly Providence, has allotted pre-eminence and diſtinction, may by the ſame petition be underſtood to requeſt ſuch a portion of wealth, as will with decency ſupport his authority and character, will correſpond to the demands of his ſtation, and ſupply him with ſuch means of liberality and beneficence as it requires from him.

In this ſenſe, therefore, the petition in the text may be applicable to general uſe, and ſuited to all orders and diſtinctions of men.

And this medium between ſuperfluity and want, which we are here inſtructed to pray for; this competency, this food convenient for us, neither above nor below the demands of our ſtation; is not only productive perhaps of as much happineſs as life can ſupply, but is alſo moſt eligible, conſidered in a religious view;

view; as may appear by obſerving, *2dly*, The moral diſadvantages which attend the two extremes of affluence and indigence deprecated in the text.

And, 1ſt, let us obſerve the moral diſadvantages attending affluence. Various vices, certain it is, are apt to take root and flouriſh in the rich ſoil and ſun-ſhine of proſperity and affluence, which would never ſhoot up, or would ſoon wither and die, in the ſhade of indigence, or in the rigorous ſeaſon of adverſity. Amidſt the numerous temptations of opulence, many have loſt that integrity which they would have preſerved and held faſt in an humbler ſtation. Many have abandoned themſelves to the indulgence of irregular paſſions, merely becauſe they had the means of indulgence in their power. Riches particularly tempt us to forget our Maker, and to ſay, *Who is the Lord?* In the midſt of proſperity, when we are receiving a continued ſucceſſion of favours from the bounty of Providence, it is then we are leaſt apt to conſider from whom we received, and to whom we are accountable for them. We are moſt unmindful of GOD, while he is giving us all things richly to enjoy; and pay the leaſt acknowledgments to his goodneſs, when we experience it the moſt.

On the other hand, a ſenſe and feeling of want is a conſtant monitor, ever reminding us of our dependence, ever calling upon us to look up to HIM by whoſe goodneſs and mercy we ſubſiſt. Whilſt our circumſtances are only equal to the character we ſuſtain, and adjuſted to our rank and condition of life, the care of heaven is viſible in the ſucceſſive ſupplies we receive. Conſcious of our own weakneſs, of the various accidents by which our labours may be defeated, and of the need we have of the aſſiſtance and favour of GOD, we are led to contemplate and acknowledge our dependence on him, to aſcribe every ſucceſs to his concurrence, and every eſcape to his protection. Every reflection upon the mercies we have received, the dangers we have eſcaped, and the difficulties we have overcome, in our journey through the world, ſuggeſts to us how wonderfully GOD has ſupported and brought us on in our way.

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This ſenſe of dependence naturally creates in us an unwillingneſs to offend, and an inclination to ſerve and pleaſe him. But he whom affluence exempts from the apprehenſions of want or danger, has not the ſame inducements to conſider the need he has of the divine aſſiſtance. Truſting to appearances, and ſecure, as he may flatter himſelf, in an independent proviſion, he is leſs concerned to ſolicit the favour of Providence. *When thy herds and thy flocks multiply, and thy ſilver and thy gold is multiplied, and all that thou haſt is multiplied; then beware*, ſays Moſes to the Iſraelites, *leſt thy heart be lifted up, and thou forget the Lord thy God.* Amidſt the fulneſs of plenty, we too often exclude from our thoughts the conſideration of that Being from whom we received it; are too apt to truſt in our goods, and boaſt in the multitude of our riches: *to ſay unto gold, Thou art my hope*; and, with the rich man in the parable, *Soul, thou haſt much goods laid up for many years, take thine eaſe.*

Thus affluence or riches, multiplied beyond the exigencies of our ſtation, withdraw and alienate the heart from God, and render us inattentive to the duties of religion, by removing or weakeningth e foundation of religion, a ſenſe of our dependence on the providence and protection of Heaven.

But further: Opulence tempts us to be as forgetful of our neighbour as of our God; and, by not ſuffering afflictions ourſelves, to be leſs diſpoſed to feel for others. They who have ſmarted under the rod of affliction, are obſerved to be moſt ſuſceptive of tenderneſs for the afflicted, moſt diſpoſed to feel and relieve their ſorrows. Affliction humaniſes and ſoftens the heart, and gives it a taſte for the ſerious pleaſures of charity and pity. But this amiable diſpoſition is counteracted by affluence, which invites to a variety of pleaſures, and inclines us to ſhun whatever may interfere with thoſe purſuits.

But here we muſt obſerve, that all indeed do not yield to the temptations of riches. There are many exceptions; many who, in the midſt of affluence, are neither unmindful of their God, nor their neighbour; many who make a virtuous and laudable uſe of that diſtinction which riches create, and add largely to their own, by generouſly contributing to the happineſs of others.

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2dly, Poverty, or the want of the decencies and conveniencies of life, has likewiſe its moral diſadvantages and dangers. Of theſe indeed mankind are ſufficiently ſenſible, and need no exhortations to concur with the ſupplicant of the text in this part of his prayer. The moral dangers attending poverty are expreſſed in theſe words; *leſt I be poor, and ſteal, and take the name of my God in vain:* that is, leſt I be tempted to ſupply my wants by unlawful methods, by fraud, injuſtice, perjury, and the like; crimes which poverty may in ſome degree extenuate, but cannot excuſe. For we ought to know with the apoſtle, both *how to be abaſed, and how to abound;* to acquieſce in all the diſpenſations of Providence; to let the will of Heaven be ours; and to retain our integrity, when we have loſt every thing elſe.

Yet the temptations in a ſtate of indigence, it cannot be diſowned, are urgent, and too often prevail. When a man finds himſelf conſtrained to deſcend from his ſtation and take a lower place, and to ſuffer all the perhaps unpitied hardſhips and afflictions attendant on ſuch a change, it requires a peculiarly right frame, and happy diſpoſition of mind, to ſubmit with patient fortitude to ſuch humiliation, and to reject every gainful temptation that offers to corrupt. If any convenient, though fraudful expedient ſhould offer to relieve his neceſſities, human weakneſs will be ſtrongly urged, with the unjuſt ſteward in the goſpel, to provide a diſhoneſt ſubſiſtence at the expence of his integrity.

Here, too, however, there are many exceptions; many who preſerve an invariable ſenſe of duty, and hold faſt their integrity amidſt the preſſures of the narroweſt and moſt diſtreſsful circumſtances.

If, then, both the extremes of affluence and indigence are thus dangerous, and often fatal, to virtue; the food convenient for us, and adjuſted to the exigencies of our ſtation, which the example in the text recommends, will be the proper ſubject of our petitions to Heaven.

But notwithſtanding the peculiar temptations attending the different ſtates of affluence and indigence, certain it is, that as no circumſtances of fortune can make us virtuous and good without our own inclination; ſo

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in no circumſtances is virtue impracticable, if we are well diſpoſed to it. We may be wicked in that medium of convenience preſcribed to our deſires in the text; or we may preſerve the ſame equal innocence, however our circumſtances may vary into either of the extremes. Poverty may produce in us an affection for things above; may give birth to the humble virtues of patience, induſtry, meekneſs, reſignation; and, amidſt the exuberance of wealth, we may exert humanity, benevolence, charity, and be rich in good works. The poſſeſſor of riches may become the patron of virtue, by lending it his authority and example; and is enabled to imitate in ſome meaſure the beneficence of his heavenly Father, and to ſupply the place of Providence to his fellow-creatures.

The text may further remind us, that as we are the creatures of GOD, we are the dependents alſo on his providence: that to him we ſhould ever look up for protection: that all events are in his hands: that they receive their exiſtence from his appointment or permiſſion: that he is never inattentive to the wants of his faithful ſervants; never neglectful to adminiſter relief, in the meaſure and method which his wiſdom judges to be moſt expedient.

Theſe ſentiments will lead us to an uncomplaining ſubmiſſion to his appointments, and an equal reſignation in all conditions. Are we poor? Have we but a ſlender portion of the good things (as they are called) of this world? If we cannot by lawful methods advance our ſtation, let us conſider it as the poſt which he has allotted us. And as it is far beyond human wiſdom to determine what rank or condition of life would upon the whole be beſt for us, let us acquieſce in the appointment of our Creator, and piouſly believe, that the ſtate aſſigned us by him is the beſt, if we are careful to make the beſt uſe of it. We have ſufficient grounds to believe, that in all his apparently unequal diſtributions, in all his providential appointments, he has the good of his creatures in view, and places them in higher or lower ſituations, according as they appear favourable to their attainment of future happineſs. He formed the conſtitution of the ſoul, and beſt knows to what moral diſorders it is liable, what regimen

regimen will be moſt conducive to its everlaſting health; and the preſcriptions of his providence, we may be aſſured, are always ſalutary though ſometimes ſevere.

On the other hand, if riches increaſe, ſet not your hearts upon them; remember always from whom they are received, and for what ends beſtowed; not to ſupport indolence; not to equip the vain, nor pamper the luxurious; not for avarice to hoard, or profligacy to ſquander. They are given by the Supreme Proprietor with a merciful intention to render us the inſtruments of his mercy, the diſpenſers of his bounty, the channels through which his proviſion for the poor ſhould paſs; and to adorn and enrich us with benevolence and liberality in its way to the relief of their indigence; by which means wealth, which often corrupts the heart, and multiplies the incentives to vice, may be turned into an occaſion of the happieſt and moſt profitable virtue.

Though God, the common parent of his creatures, is no reſpecter of perſons; though his mercy is over all his works, and his equal care extends to all; yet he appears to have diſtributed with a very partial and unequal hand his temporal ſupplies, of which ſome are altogether deſtitute, while others ſeem to riot in too ample a profuſion. The deſign of which was, doubtleſs, to conſtitute the rich his ſtewards for the poor, and through their hands to convey his bounty to them. For which reaſon, no man's riches or poſſeſſions are ſo much his own, but that the neceſſitous and indigent have ſome equitable claim to ſhare in them.

In a word, whatever may be our allotment in the world, let us be piouſly grateful to Heaven for the bleſſings we enjoy; let us endeavour to deſerve thoſe we want; and let it be the chief object of our attention, by a wiſe and virtuous uſe of the temporary treaſures or poſſeſſions intruſted to us in this life, to ſecure the eternal poſſeſſions of the next, and *to lay up for ourſelves treaſures in heaven.*

SERMON VIII.

Cauſes of Propenſity to peculiar VICES.

HEB. xii. 1.

Let us lay aſide every weight, and the ſin which doth ſo eaſily beſet us.

THE Apoſtle having in the preceding chapter diſplayed the influence and efficacy of religion as exemplified in the lives of the ſaints of former times, proceeds in this chapter to an application of his diſcourſe; and to admoniſh us, after their example, to run with patience the race that is ſet before us, and to lay aſide every weight, i. e. every criminal inclination and affection, which will otherwiſe, like a weight, retard us, and prevent our reaching the goal. Agreeable to which, by *the ſin which doth ſo eaſily beſet us*, muſt be underſtood any particular paſſion, any favourite vice, which cleaves to our affections, and, like a long garment wrapped about us, may entangle us in our Chriſtian race. We are required, therefore, to put off this particular vice, as racers did their garments in order to run without impediment, ſo as to obtain the heavenly prize.

Every human mind ſeems to have ſome peculiar character impreſſed upon it, ſome predominant inclination, ſome natural propenſity, which, we may preſume, leads to what the apoſtle meant by the ſin that ſo eaſily beſets us.

In this diſcourſe, I ſhall, *1ſt*, Point out the principal cauſes of our bias or propenſity to ſome particular vice; and, *2dly*, Shall obſerve the obligation incumbent on us, of endeavouring to lay it aſide.

I. A propenſity to particular ſins may be complexional, derived from conſtitutional frame and temperament. From the firſt parent of mankind, an hereditary corruption has been tranſmitted to all his poſterity: whence it is, that there is not a man that liveth and ſinneth not; and that the mind is as ſubject to moral diſorder, as the body to diſeaſe. But this corruption, this moral diſeaſe, which

which infected the whole human race, does not operate with equal malignity, nor is marked with the ſame ſymptoms, in all men; but puts on various appearances, and differs from itſelf in almoſt every individual. Whether this is to be aſcribed ſolely to a diverſity of texture in the body, or to ſome original diſſimilitude alſo in the frame of the mind, is uncertain. The fact, however, is apparent, that the general imperfection or corruption common to our nature, is in ſome meaſure diverſified in every individual, and diſcovers itſelf in various paſſions and propenſions, which we ſeem to bring into the world with us, and are uſually, on all occaſions, predominant. Our natural frame may render us peculiarly liable to certain vices, in the ſame manner as to ſome diſorders, more than to others. Men are born with different propenſities to pleaſure, avarice, ambition, reſentment, malice, envy, or the like. Theſe are the produce of our nature, the native growth of our corruption. They may, indeed, by various methods be cultivated, and acquire vigour and maturity; but the ſeeds of them ſeem to be natural to the ſoil, to ſhoot up ſpontaneouſly in the mind; and in proportion to our neglect of them, ſtrike a deeper root, and become ſtill more difficult to be extirpated.

Another occaſion of propenſity to particular vices is, the power of cuſtom or habit: which is commonly, and juſtly, reputed a ſecond nature, a kind of new nature ingrafted upon the former; and is often, in its influence and effects, not much inferior to it. The force and influence of cuſtom is very viſible in brute-animals, who are commonly determined by it to a certain line of action, and ſeldom quit the tract to which they have been long accuſtomed. It is the ſame in the human ſpecies: we in like manner feel the power of cuſtom and habit. Actions often repeated form habits; and habits approach near to natural propenſions. Any the moſt indifferent action, which was at firſt altogether optional and voluntary, becomes gradually, by uſe and practice, natural and almoſt neceſſary. By frequent compliance with any vice, we ſuffer it to acquire an influence which we know not how to reſiſt; and then by degrees it aſſumes an abſolute dominion: nor is it without many repeated and

determined efforts, that we can ever reſcue ourſelves from the bondage and regain our liberty.

To this principle of cuſtom or habit many vices and wrong propenſions owe their influence. It is to this principle, *(e. g.)* not to Nature, that we may aſcribe the vice of intemperance. Nature approves moderation; delights in temperate enjoyments; is diſguſted and oppreſſed by exceſs. But cuſtom and habit lead men beyond the temperate limits marked out by nature, and conduct them by degrees into the extremes of intemperance; where, though Nature denies them valuable and permanent pleaſures, they form to themſelves ſome that are fantaſtic, and ſubſiſt only in imagination.——— Another ſin into which men are led by mere cuſtom, and by nothing elſe, is the common practice of profaning the name of GOD: for to this ſin nature has no propenſity, and offers no temptation; no ſenſe is pleaſed, no inclination gratified; and our reaſon and judgment muſt always oppoſe and condemn it. Yet let this ſin be once admitted, and it will inſinuate itſelf and inſenſibly gain ground, and often prevail, even againſt the ſtrongeſt conviction of reaſon, and remain unſubdued to the laſt. Cuſtom itſelf becomes a ſeducement in this caſe: the very habit of committing the ſin tempts to a repetition of it; which, like a diſeaſe long neglected, becomes in a manner incurable.

Another occaſion of a bias or inclination to ſome particular vice may ariſe from our ſituation and condition of life. Every ſituation is expoſed to ſome peculiar inconvenience; every condition of life to its own trials. Thus affluence and poverty have each their reſpective ſeducements. And the ſame obſervation might be extended to the different periods of life, and to different profeſſions and employments, which are all expoſed to peculiar temptations, and to their correſpondent vices. In ſhort, our native paſſions and deſires, our employments and our pleaſures, our youth and our age, example, faſhion, and the like, have all an influence in leading us to ſome peculiar and predominant vice.

II. Having thus pointed out the principal cauſes of our bias or propenſity to the ſin which eaſily beſets us, I ſhall next proceed to conſider the obligation incumbent

bent on us, of endeavouring to correct or lay it aſide.—The greater propenſity we feel in ourſelves towards any culpable paſſion or failing, with the more care and vigilance ought we to watch, and with more vigorous exertions to guard againſt it: For no natural or acquired propenſion will acquit us from the imputation of guilt, or be admitted as a good plea for retaining a favourite vice. Our natural conſtitutions are indeed dependent on the will of our Creator, and not on ourſelves. Our circumſtances and ſituations in life alſo may be what his providence appointed. But the conſequence would be fatal, if we were from thence to draw this partial concluſion, that we may comply with the temptations which theſe circumſtances lay before us, and yield to the ſeducements of our temper or ſituation. For whatever trials we may meet with, whatever temptations may aſſault us, an upright and determined mind will be armed againſt them, and prepared for the conflict; and we can be under no neceſſity of yielding, but by our own conſent, and by ſuffering our paſſions to betray the ſuccours of reaſon and religion.

It will be in vain, then, to apologize for our ſins, by pleading, with our firſt parents, that we were tempted; for it is the oppoſing and rejecting temptations in which the ſpirit of religion conſiſts. This is the trial to which our Maker has deſtined us; this the warfare in which he has appointed us to engage, and in which he has alſo enabled us to conquer. In human life are many conteſts between reaſon and the paſſions. The beſt proof of our virtue is, when in theſe conteſts reaſon obtains the victory, and ſubdues every paſſion that wars againſt the ſoul. To obey God in matters indifferent, where the paſſions form no oppoſition, and no temptation invites us to offend, is an eaſy ſervice, and is to offer him a ſacrifice which coſts us nothing. The only deciſive teſt of duty is, when, in obedience to our Maker, we abſtain from thoſe ſins to which nature or habit has given us a ſtrong propenſity; when we ſacrifice to him our favourite paſſion, when we offer the beloved of our ſoul upon his altar. It will be in vain, therefore, to urge, in vindication of our offences, the propenſities of our natural temper, the power of cuſtom and habit, or the difficulties peculiar to our reſpective ſituations.

Difficulties there undoubtedly are in the practice of religion; for this life was intended to be a ſtate of trial. In the nature of a moral government of the world, there muſt be proper trials of obedience; and it has been ſuppoſed not improbable, that all intellectual beings whatever may have been originally created in a ſtate of trial or probation. Agreeably to which opinion, the ſcripture informs us, that whilſt ſome of the angels were the ſervants of GOD, and did his pleaſure, others there were who kept not their firſt eſtate, but left their own habitation. But, be this as it may, GOD, we are aſſured, will not ſuffer us to be tempted above what we are able. It is in our power to maintain the authority of reaſon, to oppoſe the corruptions of our nature and the dominion of evil habits; to reſiſt ſeducements from objects without, and temptations from paſſions within us. This is the proper work and buſineſs of religion: this the duty which GOD requires at our hands; and has therefore, undoubtedly, given us ability to perform.

One great obſtacle, indeed, to the correcting or guarding againſt the ſin that moſt eaſily beſets us, is the difficulty we often find in diſcovering and detecting it. We ſee few things in this world in a clear and true light, ourſelves, perhaps, leaſt of all. For though we have a power which no creatures in the world but ourſelves poſſeſs, a power of turning our attention inward, and obſerving the various inclinations and propenſities of the ſoul; yet ſo inattentive are we, ſo ſeldom or ſo ſlightly do we obſerve what paſſes within us, that we are in a great meaſure unknown to ourſelves, unacquainted with our own heart.

Such likewiſe is the prepoſſeſſion in our own favour, ſo flattering the glaſs that ſelf-love holds before us, that this alſo prevents us from ſeeing our deformities, and marking the true features and complexion of the mind. Quick-ſighted as we all are to the faults or foibles of others, we do not, or will not, with the ſame facility diſcern our own. Our paſſions are our apologiſts; they plead for our vices, and miſlead our judgment. The covetous man, *e. g.* condemns diſſipation, voluptuouſneſs, pride, and every other vice, but his own avarice, which to him appears in the light of a juſt and laudable œconomy

nomy and prudence. The voluptuary holds in equal deteſtation and contempt the penurious maxims and manners of the miſer; but partiality to his own pleaſures throws a veil over their guilt. The proud man may equally diſcern and cenſure the defects of both theſe characters; but his own pride, however faulty, he conſiders only as a proper and becoming dignity, which he aſſumes from conſciouſneſs of ſuperior rank or merit. And thus men, under the influence of their reſpective ruling paſſions, cenſure and condemn the vices of others; but are inſenſible, or partial, to their own.

This may be a monition to us, to ſcrutiniſe with the ſtricteſt caution our own heart, to look well if there be any culpable inclination or paſſion lurking in it, that we may not be deceived by any flattering reports of our character made by ſelf-partiality. To aſſiſt us in forming a right judgment of our conduct, and ſeeing it in a true light, the beſt method perhaps would be, to put ourſelves as much as may be out of the queſtion; to diveſt ourſelves of all concern in it; and to ſuppoſe, that we are paſſing judgment, not on ourſelves, but on another perſon. In deciding upon the actions of others, we can exclude our paſſions; we can view their conduct with indifference, and examine it with impartiality; we can conſult reaſon, and pronounce an equal, uninfluenced ſentence. But in our own cauſe, our paſſions and inclinations are all admitted to plead in our behalf; and our underſtanding is in a great meaſure under their influence, and hardly at liberty to cenſure what they approve. Such is often the partiality in our own favour, that we ſee not the deformity of our own moſt offenſive vices, whilſt we can clearly diſcern, and ſeverely cenſure, the leaſt exceptionable foible in another. As ſelf-love, then, is always partial, and ſhews us to ourſelves in a glaſs which gives not a true but a flattering likeneſs, it might be prudent to tranſfer our actions to another, and to obſerve how they look, and whether they are becoming in that other perſon in whoſe favour we have no prepoſſeſſion. Let us ſuppoſe him in the ſame ſituation with ourſelves, doing what we find ourſelves inclined to do, and conſider what opinion we ſhould form of his behaviour; and then bring it home, and apply it to ourſelves. By

this means we may perhaps prevent that corrupt influence which partiality and paſſion are apt to acquire over our reaſon and underſtanding; we may guard againſt ſelf-deception; may obtain a juſt knowledge of ourſelves, and be enabled to lay aſide the ſin, whether natural and conſtitutional, or acquired and habitual, that moſt eaſily, and perhaps almoſt imperceptibly, beſets us.

SERMON IX.

On FAITH.

HEB. x. 38.

Now the juſt ſhall live by faith.

THE firſt inſtructions in Chriſtian knowledge inform us of the importance and neceſſity of faith to our eternal happineſs. We are aſſured that the juſt ſhall live by faith; and that without it, it is impoſſible to pleaſe GOD. The word *faith* in the ſacred writings has different acceptations; and no doctrine of the ſcriptures has been more miſapprehended, and more obſcured by various miſrepreſentations, than the nature of faith. Without animadverting upon the various errors concerning it, I ſhall conſider it as implying a perſuaſion of the truth of our religion, of its doctrines, its promiſes, and declarations; and ſhall, in this diſcourſe, obſerve the reaſon why faith is, in this ſenſe, indiſpenſibly required, and declared to be the neceſſary condition of ſalvation.

1*ſt*, It ſeems abſolutely eſſential to the nature, and neceſſary to the deſign and ſucceſs of a divine revelation, that the meſſenger of it ſhould, upon producing ſufficient evidence and proper atteſtations from Heaven, inſiſt upon an acknowledgement of its truth, as proceeding

ing from that Being who cannot deceive his creatures, whoſe admonitions would not be offered but for our advantage, and whoſe authority cannot be diſobeyed without danger.

On the other hand there would be a manifeſt impropriety and inconſiſtence in offering ſuch a revelation to the world, and at the ſame time declaring, that the reception of it was a matter of indifference; that it might with ſafety be either admitted or rejected; that the one would entitle to no favour, nor the other expoſe us to diſpleaſure. A revelation introduced and propoſed with theſe circumſtances would hardly invite an examination or inquiry into its credentials; ſince by the confeſſion of the perſon who offered it, it might with ſafety be rejected; and conſequently could not be of importance to the happineſs of mankind, and therefore unlikely to be the ſubject of a divine interpoſition.

But, 2*dly*, the principal reaſon why faith is ſo indiſpenſibly required, and declared to be the condition of ſalvation, is, becauſe it is the ſureſt principle of holineſs, the baſis of obedience, the natural foundation of univerſal virtue. The faith ſo ſtrictly required, and ſo highly applauded, in ſcripture, is not a mere acknowledgment or aſſent, but a vital, active principle of obedience. Faith is as much recommended and approved in ſcripture, as ſin is reprobated and condemned: to the one is annexed the promiſe of eternal rewards; the other is prohibited by the ſevereſt denunciations. From whence it may appear, that faith is, in the ſcriptural idea of it, utterly irreconcileable and inconſiſtent with ſin: for, otherwiſe, what muſt be the fate of thoſe who believe right, and live wrong; and would conſequently, be entitled to the rewards of faith, and yet incur the condemnation and penalty denounced to diſobedience?

The faith, therefore, required in ſcripture, muſt be ſuch as includes obedience of heart and life to the precepts of the goſpel, as well as the aſſent of the mind or underſtanding to the truth it delivers. And certain it is, that if the doctrines delivered in the goſpel be regarded and conſidered with due attention, they muſt be productive of obedience to its precepts, and make us in every reſpect what we ought to be.

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If, for inſtance, we believe in our hearts, and are perſuaded of the exiſtence of a GOD, ſupremely powerful, wiſe, and good, poſſeſſed of every conceivable and poſſible perfection, we cannot but reverence and adore a nature ſo infinitely ſuperior; and every ſentiment of our heart muſt pay homage to him. If we apprehend him to be the original of good, the fountain of mercy; the author of our being, and of all the bleſſings that attend it: the creator and preſerver of the world, and of all its inhabitants, we ſhall be naturally led to acknowledge his goodneſs in all the expreſſions of worſhip, praiſe, ſubmiſſion, and obedience. If we believe that he ſent his Son into the world, by his doctrine to inſtruct, by his example to go before us in the paths of obedience, and by the merit of his death and ſufferings to purchaſe, on certain conditions, the pardon of our ſins, and an eternity of happineſs; we muſt, conſequently, think ourſelves obliged to obey the precepts of his doctrine, to imitate the example of his life, to comply with the conditions required, and be grateful for ſo amazing an expreſſion of mercy. If we firmly believe, that our bleſſed LORD has brought life and immortality to light; that, this life ended, we ſhall enter into another more important ſtate of being, wherein endleſs puniſhments await the wicked, and where manſions of eternal bliſs are prepared for the righteous; a regard to our future happineſs will concur with a ſenſe of duty, and co-operate in inviting and compelling us to the obſervance of religion.

For nothing can more influence the mind, nothing can take faſter hold of our nature, or offer more effectual compulſion to a free and moral agent, than the hopes of immortal happineſs, and the fear of never ceaſing miſery. If we were to ſuppoſe the veil drawn aſide that intercepts the proſpect of a future ſtate; if with eyes of fleſh we could look up to the throne of GOD, and ſee heaven opened, and all its glories revealed to view; it would doubtleſs be utterly impoſſible for any pleaſures or intereſts of the world, or for all the concernments of time, to ſeduce us from the purſuit of ſuch glory. Our whole attention would be fixed on heaven; that great important intereſt would fill our mind; and our

our whole care would be, ſo to paſs through things temporal, as finally to loſe not the things eternal. Faith, in ſome meaſure, draws aſide this veil, and brings futurity to view; ſets before us the joys to be inherited by the virtuous; and muſt, in the ſame manner as the real viſion, though with inferior energy, animate us to the purſuit of virtue and immortality; teach us to deſpiſe the corruptions, and reject the allurements, of the world; and to attend to the care of our everlaſting intereſt, and to a wiſe proviſion for eternity.

In like manner, all the doctrines of the goſpel are delivered with a view to ſecure obedience to its laws and precepts; as theſe alſo are framed to carry on and accompliſh the great end and purpoſe of the Creator in communicating exiſtence,—which is the felicity of his creatures. Faith is therefore recommended in Scripture, becauſe it leads us on to virtue and happineſs, and lends its friendly aid in conducting us to the higheſt perfection of our nature. It derives its value from its utility, and is to be cultivated for the fruits it produces. When the Scriptures aſſure us, that we are ſaved by faith, that we are ſanctified by it, and that all who believe are juſtified from all things; the reaſon of theſe and other ſimilar expreſſions is, that faith is the natural ground of obedience. It ſaves us not by any peculiar merit in itſelf; but by being the beſt principle of virtue, and of that holineſs without which no man ſhall ſee God; and may therefore with propriety be ſaid to be entitled to the reward of that obedience which is derived from it. Faith is not required of us for its own ſake, but in order to ſome further end; which if not attained, the mere belief or acknowledgment of the principles of religion will not avail,—will be neither acceptable to God, nor beneficial to ourſelves.

The Almighty would not have diſcovered himſelf to us, nor have required the belief of his being, his providence, or his revelation, merely that we might know there is a God, who made and governs the world, and has revealed his will to his creatures; but that this

belief

belief might have its proper effect, and be productive of obedience to its laws. Faith conſidered abſtractedly from the fruits of holineſs and goodneſs, and charity, will not recommend us to the favour of God. The excellence of faith conſiſts in its being the principle of a good life, and furniſhing the beſt motives and incitements thereto, viz. the promiſes and denunciations of the goſpel: It is a tree valuable for bringing forth good fruit; but when it fails of ſo doing, is of no value at all.

We are indeed aſſured, that whoſoever believeth in Chriſt ſhall receive remiſſion of ſins: but this expreſſion does not imply that remiſſion of ſins ſhall be granted to whoever profeſſes a belief in Chriſt, but to him only who has ſuch a ſerious and effectual conviction of the truth of his doctrine, as to make it the rule of his life and manners. It is integrity and rectitude of life, it is holineſs, alone, which can recommend us to the divine favour and acceptance; but as faith is previouſly neceſſary to holineſs, it is conſequently neceſſary in order to obtain the divine favour. Without faith it is impoſſible to pleaſe God; becauſe the practice of religion cannot ſubſiſt without a belief of its principles: we cannot worſhip God unleſs we believe that he exiſts; nor can we obey his will, unleſs we are perſuaded that he has made his will known. *He that cometh to God*, ſays the apoſtle (i. e. he who would lead a good life), *muſt believe that he is, and that he is the rewarder of them that diligently ſeek him.*

Without faith in theſe fundamental truths, without a ſubſcription to this creed at leaſt, virtuous manners, or a moral conduct, can have no ſufficient foundation. For though ſome good actions may be performed from natural temper, from the common propenſities of humanity, without any regard to principle; yet the only ſure ground-work of good morals is the belief of a Divine Being, and of a future retribution. He who acts from this principle, acts from a motive which nothing can counterbalance; and may therefore hold faſt his integrity, and perſevere invariably in the paths of virtue in oppoſition to all ſeducements.

He who is not actuated by this faith, may indeed occaſi-

occaſionally exert ſome virtues, from complexional benevolence, natural diſpoſition, or intereſted conſiderations: but can have no fixed and determined principle of goodneſs; no motive to perform unprofitable and diſagreeable duties, or to relinquiſh agreeable or profitable vices; at leaſt in private, and when the eye of the world is not upon him. Unembarraſſed, as he thinks, by the obligations and reſtraints of religion, he has no inducement to regard any rules of virtue, right, or juſtice, farther than they are conducive to his preſent pleaſure, convenience, or ſecurity. Worldly power, pleaſure, profit or reputation, can be his only aim, whoſe views and hopes terminate in this world, and who does not believe or expect that he will be accountable in another.

I ſhall now proceed to offer ſome obſervations ſuggeſted by the preceding doctrine.

1*ſt*, If faith be the ground and foundation of holineſs, we may hence learn the reaſon of the general prevalence of vice and iniquity in the world; which is, a want of faith, or want of attention to the objects of it. The iniquitous and unjuſt may ſurely be preſumed not to believe, or not well to conſider, that their ſins will bring down upon them the ſevereſt inflictions in another world. They muſt adopt ſome errors, ſome fatal deluſions, in order to impoſe upon their underſtanding, and vindicate their conduct to themſelves. They muſt ſay in their heart, *There is no God*; or that no future account will be given to him of their actions; or that the Scriptures are not his revelation; or that his juſtice is not ſo ſevere as it is repreſented; or that he does not behold iniquity; or will at laſt pardon it, and not execute the inflictions he has denounced. By theſe, or other ſimilar illuſions, ſin muſt come recommended, before it can poſſibly become the object of deliberate choice.

2*dly*, If faith be ſubſervient to holineſs, and derives its value from its efficacy and influence on our manners, we may hence learn to eſtimate the intrinſic value of every doctrine, and to weigh the degrees of malignity and danger in particular errors. Doctrines are valuable, in proportion to their moral importance,

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or ſubſervience to virtue; in proportion to their influence in inclining us to preſerve in our minds a conſtant ſenſe of our dependence on our Maker, and of the duties we owe him, and of our obligations to obſerve integrity, and juſtice, and equity, and charity, in all our dealings. Erroneous opinions, ſo far as they are merely ſpeculative, and have no tendency to corrupt morals, or to encourage or ſeduce to vice, ſeem liable only to the charge of weakneſs. But in what degree ſoever they are injurious to virtue, and have no immoral tendency, they are in the ſame degree pernicious to men, and offenſive in the eye of Heaven.

Laſtly, If the end and deſign, the original view and intention, of faith, was to lead us to the practice of all righteouſneſs and goodneſs; let us not reſt our hopes of ſalvation on a bare acknowledgment or belief of the goſpel in an ineffectual barren faith, productive of no virtue; but let our faith have its proper influence; let our manners correſpond with our principles; and let us live as we believe. *For what doth it profit*, ſays the apoſtle, *though a man ſay he hath faith, and hath not works? can faith ſave him?* Such faith is dead, ineffectual to all purpoſes of ſalvation; for faith can no otherwiſe ſave us, than by its influence on our manners. Integrity of life is the genuine fruit of a right faith, as a depravity of morals may be expected to be the natural conſequence of infidelity. We have good grounds to think we poſſeſs a ſaving faith, when our obedience is not defective; and that we are true believers of the goſpel, when we live up to its rules.

On the other hand, whatever creed we profeſs, whatever church we adhere to, or with whatever appearance of zeal we may deceive the world, or ourſelves; yet, if we live in a violation or neglect of the precepts and duties of religion, our faith is vain; whilſt we believe, we muſt tremble; the faith which ſhould ſave us, will be our condemnation. —That we may all poſſeſs ſuch an influential and effectual faith, as will produce obedience, and inſure the ſalvation of our ſouls, may GOD of his infinite mercy grant!

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SERMON X.

Inſufficiency of this World to our Happineſs, and the conſequent Probability of a Future State.

Coloss. iii. 2.

Set your affections on things above, not on things on the earth.

TOO great an attachment to the world and its enjoyments is the ſource of numberleſs diſorders in human life, and leads us often aſtray from the paths of wiſdom and happineſs: the ſcripture, therefore, often exhorts us to rectify our opinion of the world, to call off our affections from its pleaſures, and to direct them to objects of a far higher and nobler nature, things celeſtial and eternal. To this end, I ſhall conſider, *1ſt*, How little reaſon we have to place our affections ſolely or principally on this world and its enjoyments; and *2dly*, Shall obſerve, that from the deficiency and imperfection of all worldly enjoyments we may infer our future happier exiſtence in another ſtate.

I. The wiſeſt of men, who tried every project, purſued every plan of pleaſure, that deſire could ſuggeſt, and was poſſeſſed of every advantage that might be ſuppoſed to favour his purſuit, finiſhed his courſe of experiments with this concluſion, that *all is vanity and vexation of ſpirit*. And indeed a wiſdom and experience much inferior to that of Solomon might ſuffice to ſhow, that earthly pleaſures are defective, are not commenſurate to the deſires and capacity of the ſoul; and that true happineſs is not here to be found. On the contrary, the ſcripture aſſerts, that *man is born to trouble*; and nature and experience but too well confirm the aſſertion.

But as it is always with reluctance we admit unwelcome truths, we are always willing to form, therefore, a favourable idea of human life; and in the viſions of hope and fancy, we form plans of happineſs which we can never execute. Though deceived by paſt pleaſures,

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we give credit to the future, and live in perpetual expectation of what we never obtain. Urged by an inextinguiſhable thirſt of happineſs, never fully gratified with what we have, we are always looking forward to ſomething we have not; ſomething that imagination preſents to us at a diſtance, and tells us will effect the completion of our wiſhes. Thither then we direct our ſteps. But when, by much toil and labour, perhaps, we have made ſome progreſs, and have overcome various obſtacles, and almoſt reached the object of our hopes, ſome accident always interpoſes, ſomewhat always ſteps in, and ſtands in the way between us and happineſs, and prevents either the attainment of what we had in view, or the enjoyment we expected in it.

Such is the lot of human life, either to be debarred from our wiſhes; or, if we are permitted to ſucceed in them, to find, by a comfortleſs experiment, how little our ſucceſs contributes to our happineſs; to find, that what we have been purſuing, borrowed its chief value from the miſtakes of imagination; that our paſſions had over-rated it; that the pleaſure of the acquiſition gradually diminiſhes, and wears off with the novelty of it; and that no ſooner have we obtained one wiſh, than we begin to form another. If one deſire is gratified, another ſucceeds; ſomething unattained ſtill engages us in a freſh purſuit; and we run an endleſs race for a prize we never win. Thus mankind go on ſeeking what they cannot find, or finding what they ſought to be but illuſion when they approach it. We vary our plan, and wander from project to project; but meet the ſame diſſatisfaction, and are at laſt, perhaps, farther from happineſs than at our firſt ſetting out.

Such is our nature, and the nature of all worldly enjoyments, that we can neither ceaſe to purſue, nor ever find the felicity we expected in them. Providence, doubtleſs for wiſe ends, has thought fit to intermix human life with good and evil; to tincture all its pleaſures with a degree of bitterneſs: the pureſt are not unmixed; the beſt may ſatiate, but cannot ſatisfy.

But ſhould we admit that the pleaſures of the world have (what they are far from having) all that we fancy to be in them; were they valuable as imagination is apt

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to repreſent, and our paſſions to believe them; yet he who enjoys the greateſt happineſs, wants one happineſs more,—a ſecurity for the future of what he poſſeſſes at preſent. For ſuch is the precarious tenure of all earthly poſſeſſions or pleaſures, that we can ſcarcely call them our own. Stability is not the property of any thing here below, in this region of accidents and uncertainty. Many of us may by experience know, that almoſt every fleeting year carries away with it ſome portion of our pleaſure, ſome enjoyment, ſome friend perhaps, ſome object of delight, ſomewhat which we have been accuſtomed to conſider as conſtituting a part of our happineſs. Our pleaſures, like ourſelves, are all tranſitory and mortal; and ſhort as life is, yet we often ſurvive them all.

But were the enjoyments of the world in their nature ſtable and permanent, is there not yet an irreverſible decree which muſt make them ceaſe to us? If they do not make themſelves wings and flee from us, muſt not we by neceſſity of nature forſake them?—we who are hourly haſtening to a diſſolution; when the world and all its enjoyments, with regard to us, come to an end! Life itſelf is as uncertain as any of its pleaſures. We are frail and mortal, as well as all things about us mutable and periſhing. When we have with much labour, perhaps, and long perſeverance, collected the materials of enjoyment, and formed a plan, and laid a foundation, and built, as we think, a durable ſtructure, the laſt enemy comes, and by him the beſt built fabric of human happineſs is laid in the duſt.

If, then, the enjoyments of the world are thus defective; if the purſuit is anxious, the poſſeſſion unſatisfying, the tenure precarious; where is the wiſdom of ſetting ſo high a price upon them? Why do we lay out all our time and care upon ſhadows and illuſions? Why ſet our whole affections upon enjoyments that are often ſought in vain, are vain when found, that can neither ſatisfy us while we live, nor ſave us from the hand of death, and muſt ſoon either forſake or be forſaken by us?

Which leads me to obſerve,

II. That from the defects and imperfection of all earthly enjoyments, we may infer our future happier exiſtence in another ſtate.

The happineſs of mankind, we have the greateſt reaſon to believe, was the original deſign of the Creator in giving them exiſtence. We can conceive no other purpoſe worthy of him in his plan of creation. If this purpoſe does not now take effect, may we not be aſſured that it will be accompliſhed hereafter? If our heavenly Father does not beſtow on us his children our portion of felicity in this world, may we not infer that he reſerves this inheritance for another ſtate? May we not hope, that if we are not prodigal children; if we are not undutiful to ſo kind a Parent; if we make it our care to ſerve him, and not at any time to tranſgreſs his commandments;—may we not hope that we ſhall be ever with him; and that all that he has, all the happineſs he can beſtow, will one day be ours?

Imperfect, and far inadequate to the capacity and deſires of the ſoul, are all the enjoyments of this world. To man alone, of all creatures upon earth, is denied a happineſs commenſurate to the full extent of his powers. Nature ſeems to have made ample proviſion for her other children, and beſtowed on them all the enjoyment their appetites crave. Man alone, though ever in purſuit, is never in poſſeſſion of happineſs. Impatient amidſt all he can acquire, he is ever (in imagination at leaſt) making excurſions in ſearch of ſome higher felicity, higher indeed than either Nature or Providence will here permit him to poſſeſs. Why, then, was man ſo formed as never to acquieſce in his portion here below? why created with capacities ſo extenſive, for enjoyments ſo limited? or for what end were implanted in him deſires greater than the world can ſatisfy? Not, ſurely, to mock his expectations, and diſquiet him in vain; not merely to make a ſuperfluous addition to other troubles to which he is born. Theſe deſires and capacities the Divine Wiſdom has doubtleſs ſuited to our condition, and planted in the mind for ſome wiſe and good end: and they ſeem meant to point out an hereafter; to indicate the immortality of our being; to intimate that this world was not deſigned to be the ſcene of our felicity; that God hath better things in reſerve for us; that we ſhould look, therefore, beyond the world, to another ſtate, where thoſe deſires will not be in vain; where he will

will fill up the meaſure of our capacities, and Himſelf, who is boundleſs as our deſires, will be the object we ſo much long for.

Such ſhould ſeem to be the divine intentions intimated in the frame of our nature. Were this world indeed the laſt, as well as firſt, ſcene of our exiſtence; were man created for no better purpoſe than to employ for a few years his ſkill and care in the ſupport of a frail body, which no care or ſkill can ſave from corruption; to engage in the vain purſuit of happineſs, which he can neither ceaſe to deſire, nor has power to attain; and were he then to return, and mix for ever with the duſt from which he was formed;——were theſe the purpoſes, this the end of his being, might we not complain of Nature's unkindneſs? Might we not expoſtulate with our Creator in the language of the Pſalmiſt, *Wherefore haſt thou made all men in vain?* Had the Almighty no farther view in our creation than a ſhort ſubſiſtence on this world; were the enjoyments of this life, ſuch as they are, all we muſt be permitted to taſte; and were all our hopes and proſpects to terminate in the grave;——it would be hard to reconcile this procedure with infinite wiſdom and beneficence; hard to ſay to what end we live here, were we not to live hereafter. Unhappy indeed would be the lot of human nature, if after our voyage in this turbulent ocean of life, after a perhaps tempeſtuous paſſage, we were never to make the land of everlaſting reſt, never to arrive at the haven where we would be; but were deſtined to periſh in the deep, and ourſelves, and all our hopes, to be wrecked, and loſt for ever! Too, too wretched a fate this, to be the appointment of our all-gracious Creator. The Wiſeſt and Beſt of Beings, we may be aſſured, would never have ſent us into the world, only to be born to dangers and troubles we cannot avoid, and to the deſires and hopes of a felicity we were never to attain; but moſt certainly deſigned this world to be introductory to a better, where thoſe deſires will find correſpondent objects, and where happineſs adapted to the impreſſions he has given to our ſouls will be found.

Were our preſent life a ſtate of pure unmixed enjoyment, tinctured with no ſorrows, unembittered with anxieties or fears, we might be tempted to ſuſpect that

this life is our all; that we have nothing beyond it to expect; and that the purpoſes of God with regard to mankind extend no farther. But the inſufficiency, the emptineſs and vanity, of all earthly enjoyments, lead us to another concluſion, and bid us apprehend ſome other more important purpoſes of his wiſdom. Whatever darkneſs there may be in the ways of Providence; though no human underſtanding can penetrate the counſels of the Supreme Being; though it ſhould be deemed preſumption to ſay what was the preciſe view, the chief and ultimate object, of Divine Wiſdom in his plan of creation; yet of this we may be aſſured, (if aſſurance may in any thing be obtained), that the infinitely wiſe and good Author of nature would never have given us being with any view that was not conſiſtent with a regard to our happineſs; and conſequently, would never have ſent us into the world, only to be amuſed and flattered with viſionary hopes and expectations, and to ſuffer much by an inevitable ſucceſſion of pains and ſorrows; and muſt therefore have had in view another, better, happier ſtate of being when he placed us in this.

If he had deſigned us for this life only, why is it not to the virtuous and good, as happy, and perfect, as abſolute Goodneſs might have made it? or why did he plant in the mind ſuch hopes, capacities, and deſires, as the world cannot, and nothing leſs than immortality can, ſatisfy? But if this world has a relation to another, and was meant to be introductory to it, it might be agreeable to the Supreme Wiſdom and Goodneſs to give us thoſe intimations or notices of our future exiſtence. All the hopes and intimations of a future exiſtence that Nature and Reaſon ſuggeſt, Revelation happily confirms and eſtabliſhes; and aſſures us, that we are now only in the infancy of our being; that we ſhall live eternal ages: bids us therefore extend our views beyond the world, and look forward to a felicity ſuperior to what it can furniſh, a felicity equal to our largeſt deſires, ineſtimable in value, and endleſs in duration.

Let it then be our firſt and principal concern, to live up to the proſpects we have in view; to live in this our preſent ſtate, as we ſhall hereafter wiſh to have lived: not

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ſo attentive to the objects of time, as to overlook thoſe of eternity; not purſuing every illuſion, every fugitive phantom or appearance of happineſs, and forgetting that which we confeſs to be ſupreme. Paſs but a few years, and the world to us will be no more; the ſcene will be changed, the curtain will drop between us and things on earth; and then the conviction muſt come, (may it not come too late!) that the intereſts, honours, pleaſures, and poſſeſſions, of the world, were unworthy of the place they held in our eſteem; and that a wiſe proviſion for another more important ſtate of being, to which we gave perhaps little attention, was infinitely conſequential to us.

Be religion then our chief object; eternity our firſt and great concern: let temporal cares be only of inferior conſideration. Let our affection to the world be ſubordinate to the love of GOD; let his favour be the ultimate aim and end of all our purſuits; and let a principle of obedience to him give laws to our whole conduct and behaviour:—So we may hope, that his hand will mercifully guide and conduct us through the preſent ſhort, illuſive, ſcene of fleeting images of pleaſure, to the great and laſting realities of a future and more perfect ſtate; where we ſhall poſſeſs the largeſt meaſure of felicity that our improved capacities can admit, and ſhall dwell amidſt fullneſs of joy and pleaſures for evermore.

SERMON XI.

Marks of being ſincerely RELIGIOUS.

JOSHUA XXIV. 14.

Fear the Lord, and ſerve him in ſincerity and in truth.

SINCERITY is the diſpoſition of ſoul which alone can recommend us to GOD, and incline him to look with an eye of mercy upon the errors and frailties of our conduct. For though GOD does not demand perfection from imperfect creatures; though he expects neither infallibility in our moral determinations, nor impeccability in our conduct; yet he requires the faithful ſervices of a heart conſcious only of holy reſolutions and pure intentions: he commands us to *ſerve him in ſincerity and in truth.*

As this diſpoſition, therefore, is eſſential to our well-being; as without it the certain conſequence will be, an excluſion from the divine favour, and from the hopes of future felicity; I ſhall in this diſcourſe obſerve, by what marks or teſts we may diſcover whether we are poſſeſſed of a ſincere piety; that we may enjoy its conſolations if we have it, or endeavour to acquire it if we have it not.

I. If we would know whether we ſerve GOD in ſincerity, let us look with an attentive eye into our hearts, in order to trace the true ſprings or principles of our actions. If, upon ſuch inſpection, we find that our conduct is founded upon ſentiments of duty; that the virtues which appear in us are not appearances only, but proceed from the heart; from a regard to the authority of our Maker; from a grateful ſenſe of his goodneſs and of our obligations; from a reverential fear of incurring his diſpleaſure; from a delight and complacency in virtue, or from the hopes of obtaining thoſe eternal rewards which are promiſed to it; if we act from a ſincere deſign of advancing the honour of GOD, or the welfare of our neighbour; of cultivating harmony and peace, aiding the cauſe of piety and virtue, or contributing in ſome ſhape to the public happineſs;——then we may judge

judge our piety to be ſincere, becauſe our conduct is founded on religious conſiderations, ſuch as God himſelf has offered and preſcribed to our obedience.

But, on the other hand, we muſt not think that we "ſerve God in ſincerity and truth," when any worldly conſiderations whatever are at the bottom of our pretended piety; when our religion is oſtentatious; when, by the ſhow of juſtice and uprightneſs, we mean only to lead the world into an opinion of our integrity; when we are charitable and humane, in order to acquire the reputation of that character; when we clothe ourſelves with humility, from the pride of appearing humble; when we practiſe liberality, munificence, or other popular virtues, merely to favour the ſucceſs of ſome worldly project; or when we attend the public ſervice of God, to comply with faſhion, or to avoid reproach. In all ſuch caſes, let our actions be apparently ever ſo religious; yet, as they proceed not from a right principle, they are only the ſhadows or appearances of religion without its reality, the form of godlineſs without its power.

In a moral eſtimate, every action muſt be placed to the account of that principle from which it is derived. Intereſted motives and worldly views reduce and ſink the worth of the beſt actions; and, on the other hand, a right intention gives a value to the meaneſt, and turns every thing we do into virtue. A cup of cold water, adminiſtered by a charitable hand, is, in the eye of Heaven, far more eſtimable, than the much richer offerings of thoſe who give that they may be ſeen of men. Theſe are offered to men, and will be rewarded with human applauſe; the former is lent unto God, who will repay with infinite intereſt every ſuch debt of virtue. St. Paul ſuppoſes it poſſible for a man to give all his goods to feed the poor, and yet not have charity. He may, from oſtentation, or other motives, relieve diſtreſſes which his heart never feels nor commiſerates. We muſt judge, therefore, of our ſincerity by the principles upon which we act. If our conduct is founded ſolely upon religious principles, our piety is ſincere. If the virtues that appear in us proceed from worldly conſiderations, ſuch actions are at beſt but prudential, and may have neither good nor evil in them. If both virtuous and prudential conſiderations coincide, and

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co-operate in producing the ſame actions, and exciting us to the ſame behaviour; as, perhaps, in the beſt of men, the lower views of recommending themſelves to the world may occaſionally mingle with better motives; the teſt of our ſincerity in ſuch caſes is defective, as it may be difficult for ourſelves to determine whether duty or intereſt was the true principle of our actions, or whether a regard to duty would have prompted us to the ſame behaviour in oppoſition to motives of intereſt. Such actions, though they have the exterior form, the image and ſuperſcription, of virtue, and may paſs current in the world; yet the purity of them is debaſed, and their intrinſic or moral value diminiſhed in proportion to the worldly allay with which they are adulterated.

II. Another evidence of our ſerving God in ſincerity is, when we are as careful to preſerve a good conſcience as to ſave appearances; and act with the ſame integrity in ſecret, where God is the ſole ſpectator of our actions, as when they lie open to the view and obſervation of the world. If a man is truly devout, he will offer up private addreſſes to his Maker, as well as attend his public worſhip; and will with the ſame ſtrict caution, practiſe ſelf-examination, meditation, vigilance, duties to be tranſacted remote from the eye of the world, between God and himſelf, as other more viſible duties, to which decency, cuſtom, or the fear of cenſure, may oblige him. Is he ſincerely honeſt? He will be faithful to his obligations and promiſes, though there be no witneſs to prove them, and no law to compel the performance. If he is ſtrictly juſt, he will take no ſecret inſidious advantage of the neceſſity, incapacity, or inadvertence, of his neighbour; nor with-hold from him his right, however lucrative the fraud, or however concealed. If he is truly humane and benevolent, he will be as ready to diſtribute private, unſeen alms, as to give them openly to the public demands of charity. And by the ſame teſt, the genuineneſs of all other virtues may be tried and examined; and we may pronounce them counterfeit and ſpurious, if they are not the ſame when no eye but God can ſee us, as when we act upon the public ſtage and in the view of the world.

III. Another evidence of our ſerving God in ſincerity

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and in truth is, when we pay an equal regard to the whole law; and mean not, by ſelecting ſome favourite duties, to compenſate for the habitual violation or neglect of others that happen not to fall in with our taſte and inclination. He who confines his regard to ſome ſelect virtues, and is neglectful of others which have the ſame claim to regard, muſt not think that he ſerves God in ſincerity; for, even in thoſe inſtances where he appears to obey, he may juſtly be ſuſpected to act in compliance not with the divine commands, but natural diſpoſition; and not to ſerve God, but his own inclination. Religion requires us to act always from a principle of obedience to that Almighty Being to whom obedience is due; and this principle will teach us an equal indiſcriminating regard to all its precepts. No more common miſtake in religion, than the ſubſtituting of ſome part for the whole, and the expectation of compenſating for the habitual neglect of ſome diſagreeable duties, by a regular attention to others more ſuited to our taſte. Some perſons, *e. g.* there are, whoſe minds are of a religious caſt, who are devout in the offices of public worſhip, ſtrict and regular in all its ritual obſervances, attentive to every circumſtance which regards the exterior of religion; and from obſerving and approving in themſelves this diſpoſition, ſpeak peace to their ſoul, and truſt in themſelves that they are righteous, and not as other men are. At the ſame time they perhaps conſider not how defective they poſſibly are in the weightier matters of the law; how inattentive to moral obligations, to benevolence, charity, meekneſs, fidelity, or other virtues. Others, again, of a different character, place all religion in the moral duties, in a faithful obſervance of every ſocial obligation; are concerned to conduct themſelves by the rules of honeſty, humanity, and truth; to be as friendly and uſeful as their ſtations or abilities permit, and to perform ſuch juſt or kind offices as their various relations to others exact from them: yet live as without God in the world, in an avowed indifference or neglect of his worſhip; in a continued courſe of inattention to the Greateſt and Beſt of Beings, to whom their obligations

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are infinite, from whom they receive every thing, and to whom they can return nothing but the obedience of a grateful heart. They conſider not that ſentiments and expreſſions of gratitude are much more due to the Supreme author of every good gift, than to inferior benefactors; nor do they reflect, that the moſt uſeful expreſſion of benevolence, the moſt beneficial charity to mankind, is by an open, conſpicuous and avowed regard and attachment to religion, to endeavour to put a ſtop to that general corruptneſs and diſſoluteneſs of manners, that overflowing of ungodlineſs, that prevailing torrent of iniquity, which, if ſuffered to go on, muſt deluge the world with diſtreſſes too great for charity to relieve.

Various indeed are the examples of partial obedience; but if we would ſerve God in ſincerity, we muſt pay an univerſal regard to his commands, and an equal attention to every duty: and though the paſſions may in ſome inſtances prevail againſt reaſon, and it is vain to expect a total exemption from thoſe infirmities which render a complete unerring obedience altogether impracticable; yet we muſt not apoſtatiſe from any one duty, nor knowingly and avowedly continue in any ſingle inſtance to counteract the Divine will.

IV. Another evidence of our ſerving God in ſincerity is, when we reſiſt and overcome temptations: for to ſerve God in theſe inſtances only where we are not tempted to diſobey, is a very defective teſt of our integrity. The deciſive proof is, when we are faithful to our duty in oppoſition to ſeducements, and reject every ſolicitation that offers to corrupt us. We are here placed in a probationary ſtate, where our obedience is expoſed to numerous trials and temptations, numerous as are the views, inclinations, paſſions, and intereſts of mankind. From theſe no condition, ſtation, or circumſtance of life, is exempt. And hence ariſe various conflicts in the mind between reaſon and paſſion, between the affections of nature and the principles of religion. If in ſuch conteſts we find that reaſon and religion prevail, and that inclinations and paſſions are reſtrained, and gratified only within the bounds that religion preſcribes,

ſcribes, it is an argument of our virtue and ſincerity in the ſervice of God.

V. The laſt evidence I ſhall mention of our ſerving God in ſincerity is, if, in caſes where we are doubtful of the obligation or lawfulneſs of an action, we always incline to do what appears moſt conformable to duty, what will beſt anſwer the ends of piety, and be moſt conducive to the honour of religion.

It is impracticable to give particular directions in all the endleſs variety of circumſtances incident to human life. The laws of Chriſtianity do not, nor is it poſſible they ſhould, mark out, in all poſſible caſes, the preciſe bounds of vice and virtue, right and wrong; but contain only general precepts and inſtructions concerning them. Charity, *e. g.* is a principal duty of religion. We are required to do good, and to diſtribute, to give alms of ſuch things as we have, and to be merciful after our power: but it is not eaſy to ſay when we act up to thoſe obligations; not eaſy to determine the juſt meaſure of our liberality, what portion preciſely of our fortune we ought to devote to charity, or how far, in many caſes, our own good ought to yield and give way to another's. Equally difficult it is to diſcern the point where temperance ends and intemperance begins; or accurately to mark the boundaries between forgiveneſs and reſentment, humility and pride, ſobriety and luxury, or any other virtues and their oppoſite vices. In all ſuch dubious ſituations, where the bounds of duty cannot be ſufficiently aſcertained, and where we cannot diſcern and accurately determine the line which divides right from wrong, lawful from unlawful; it ought to be a ſacred maxim with us, to give duty the preference to every other conſideration, and to keep on that ſide of the boundary where our innocence will be moſt ſecure. No divine law has preſcribed how often we ought to offer up public devotions to God. Should we, then, be doubtful whether we are ſtrictly obliged to attend the duties of public worſhip as often as the practice of the church allows an opportunity, and whether every neglect is criminal; yet it will admit of no doubt, that a regular attendance on public worſhip is much ſafer with regard to our future ſalvation, and more conformable to

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the genius and deſign of religion, than frequent omiſſions of that duty poſſibly can be. So alſo anger, within certain bounds, is not prohibited by the laws of religion. We are permitted to be angry, provided we ſin not. To what extent, in particular caſes, this paſſion may innocently be indulged, or when it becomes intemperate in degree or duration, may be a matter of difficult deciſion. Whenever, therefore, a ſuſpicion ariſes, that our reſentment may have exceeded its juſt limits, it is obvious, that it will be moſt prudent to curb and reſtrain it, and act in ſo guarded a manner as to be ſecure againſt tranſgreſſion. And in all queſtionable caſes whatſoever, if we ſerve GOD with ſincerity, we ſhall make it our firſt care to enſure our integrity, and to avoid even doubtful and ſuſpected, as much as avowed and apparent, guilt.

From theſe various teſts and evidences, then, which have been mentioned, we may form a judgment of the ſincerity and integrity of our heart. If we act, not merely from ſecular views and conſiderations, but from principles of religion and ſentiments of duty; if we are equally religious and honeſt in private, where GOD is the ſole ſpectator of our deportment, as when we appear upon the public ſtage of the world; if we endeavour to pay an equal obedience to the whole law, and mean not by a ſtricter attention to ſome duties, to atone for the violation or neglect of others; if we find that our integrity is determined, and proof againſt ſeducements, and that in doubtful caſes we always take the part which will beſt ſecure a good conſcience, and guard againſt every approach even to ſuſpected guilt; —we may conclude, that we obey the inſtruction in the text, and that we *ſerve God in ſincerity and in truth.*

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SERMON XII.

Government of the PASSIONS.

PROV. iv. 23.

Keep thy heart with all diligence: for out of it are the iſſues of life.

THE heart in antient philoſophy, and in the language of moraliſts, is ſuppoſed to be the ſeat of the ſoul; and is uſed by the ſacred and other moral writers, to denote the deſires, propenſions, paſſions and affections of our nature: And *to keep the heart*, ſignifies, duly to regulate and govern thoſe paſſions and affections by the dictates of reaſon; a duty than which none can be more neceſſary and eſſential to our preſent peace and future felicity! "For out of the heart are the iſſues of life:" *i. e.* according as we guard our hearts, our lives will be well or ill conducted; and rendered, in conſequence, happy or miſerable. Our happineſs, we may be aſſured, muſt depend upon the due regulation and conduct of our paſſions: for if rational beings could, like inferior creatures, find their happineſs in implicitly yielding to every impulſe of appetite and paſſion, our Creator would not have laid us under the obligation of laws and precepts, but left us to the free, unreſtricted indulgence of inclination. Self government, then, or a due ſubjection of the paſſions to reaſon, is a duty abſolutely requiſite to our well-being.

In diſcourſing on which, I ſhall conſider, *1ſt*, When our paſſions become culpable; *2dly*, How much our happineſs depends on the right government of our paſſions; and, *laſtly*, By what means this government may be attained.

I. Let us conſider when our paſſions become culpable. One ſect there was of antient philoſophers, who condemned all emotion of mind, held every paſſion to be culpable, becauſe inconſiſtent with that ſerenity of temper, that equal tranquillity of mind, which they thought ſhould ever be preſerved. They admoniſhed

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their disciples, therefore, to suppress and extinguish all passions, as incompatible with wisdom, and unbecoming the character of a rational being. But this instruction was an affected and impracticable refinement, ill suited to the nature of man, who is a compound of reason and passion. Our affection to some objects, and aversion to others, are not creatures of the mind, depend not on our own choice; they are of Nature's planting; nor can we, by any act of the will, lay aside those innate dispositions, and with equal indifference meet health or sickness, pleasure or pain. As our nature is the work of an infinitely wise and good Being, we cannot suppose there are any principles or affections planted in us in vain, or that ought to be totally extirpated; nor can we think, that he would form us with passions, and then require us to be wholly dispassionate. This Stoical doctrine, therefore, seems better calculated for heaven than earth; adapted rather to the souls of men made perfect, who may be under the sole guidance and influence of reason, than to the present imperfect state of our being, as our various affections and passions are necessary spurs and incitements to action, and without them we should sink into a languid state of indolence and inactivity.

The passions and affections which the Creator has planted in the human heart, far from being in their nature culpable, were all originally designed to have either our own personal good or the good of others, for their object, and to be assisting to every virtue; though they are too generally misapplied by our corruption, and degenerate into vices. Under the direction of reason, they are conducive to the best purposes; but productive of the worst, when they throw off that subordination. For a rational indulgence as much differs from intemperance of passion, as the healthful circulation and gentle current of the blood differs from the impetuous tide of a fever. Our rational and moral powers ought always to have dominion over the inferior principles of our nature. To our reason all our inclinations, desires, passions, and affections, ought to be subordinate. It ought to appoint their limits; to draw the line beyond which they should not pass; to determine when and how far they should be gratified, and where and in what measure restrained.

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If we reflect upon the ſeveral affections and principles of the mind, we ſhall perceive, that reaſon is by nature appointed ſuperior to the others, and deſigned to ſuperintend and govern them; ſo that we may ſay of reaſon, what the Pſalmiſt ſays of the Author of reaſon, *It is ſet on the throne that judgeth right.* Its natural and rightful place in the mind is that of ſuperiority to all our paſſions, and of abſolute dominion over them.

So near and intimate, indeed, to mankind is reaſon, and ſuch is its ſovereign and natural authority, that a deliberate purpoſe to oppoſe its government is hardly poſſible. Even when moſt ſolicited and importuned by paſſions, ſeldom can we deliberately and avowedly oppoſe reaſon, without many painful ſtruggles to evade the force of conviction, and reconcile ourſelves to the guilty practice. But whenever we ſuffer paſſions to oppoſe or evade the authority of the higher powers of reaſon and conſcience, they betray us into a wrong conduct; may lead to every thing that is criminal, and involve us in the deepeſt guilt. For paſſion, be it remembered, is no good apology for wrong conduct. We all ſtand accountable for the uſe of our reaſon; and where reaſon points out to us good and evil, if we chooſe the latter, we doubtleſs appear guilty in the eye of our heavenly Judge. In this caſe, it will be in vain to apologiſe by pleading paſſion in our defence: for the very intention of giving us reaſon was, to enable us to conduct and govern our paſſions; and the acting from the influence of any paſſion, in oppoſition to the dictates of reaſon, is the very iniquity that religion prohibits and condemns. To plead paſſion, then, in our defence, is to plead our guilt in our own vindication, is at once to acknowledge and juſtify our crimes.

It is indeed no eaſy taſk for reaſon to maintain its ſovereignty, and to reduce and keep the paſſions in due ſubjection. They are turbulent and ſeditious ſubjects, that often throw off all obedience, and mutiny and rebel againſt the power that has a natural and rightful dominion over them. But though we cannot wholly extirpate or ſubdue, yet to regulate and ſubject them to government is not only the duty, but the proper and moſt important employment, of a rational being.

II. For let it be obſerved, 2dly, That " out of the heart

heart are the iſſues of life;" that our happineſs here, as well as hereafter, is determined by the conduct of our paſſions. For when they are duly regulated, and act under the guidance and direction of reaſon, we may promiſe ourſelves all the happineſs that our ſtation or other circumſtances of life will admit: we ſhall reflect with pleaſure on a conduct of ſo much propriety, ſo right, ſo decent, ſo becoming our nature; we ſhall enjoy all the exterior advantages, the ſecurity, eſteem, and regard, that naturally attend a virtuous deportment; all the interior ſatisfaction, all the rational ſelf-complacency, that reſult from the conſciouſneſs of right behaviour; and all the pleaſing hopes and expectations that can be derived from a well grounded confidence in the favour and approbation of Him who made, and will hereafter judge us. But, on the other hand, if, rejecting the councils of reaſon, we reſign ourſelves to the conduct of any ſenſual, ſelfiſh, or malevolent paſſion; to avarice, ambition, voluptuouſneſs, malice, envy, revenge, or the like; a train of various evils may be the unhappy conſequence. Paſſions when no longer under the direction of reaſon, are blind guides, and lead to the moſt fatal errors and misfortunes. If they lead to actions hurtful to ſociety, they are puniſhed by the reſentment of ſociety; if to vices of a perſonal nature, they find their puniſhment at home, in pains, perplexities, fears, ſorrows, diſeaſes, and death. And every culpable indulgence of paſſion will ſubject us to that tribunal which is erected in every human heart, where conſcience ſits as judge.

They who are at no pains to diſcipline and govern their paſſions, but diſregarding right and wrong, indiſcriminately follow whitherſoever inclination points the way, may find ſome pleaſure in ſuch purſuits; but none that can compenſate for the loſs of thoſe interior ſatisfactions, as well as exterior advantages, that naturally reſult from a wiſe and virtuous conduct; none that can compenſate for the cenſure of the world, for the reproaches of their own conſcience, or for the painful apprehenſions and terrors of a future ſupreme tribunal, which will one day affirm the ſentence that conſcience has pronounced. Well it were if the conſequences of irregular

irregular paſſions were to be felt only in this life. The ſad conſideration of all is, that by their influence we may contract a heavy debt of guilt, and become liable to the juſtice of an offended God, whoſe laws we tranſgreſs, whoſe authority we contemn, and whoſe diſpleaſure therefore we have reaſon to apprehend.

The government, then, of our paſſions, is an object highly conſequential, and demands our ſtricteſt care.

III. The means by which this ſelf government may be attained, was the laſt thing propoſed.

The art of conducting and governing our paſſions is of daily uſe, and of much more importance than many other purſuits to which we give our time and attention. Without this art, affluence or power, or perſonal or mental accompliſhments, will adminiſter little ſatisfaction; and, whatever our other attainments may be, we ſhall neither attain virtue, nor wiſdom, nor happineſs. The beſt, the moſt religious perſons muſt be conſcious of frequent failings, frequent offences againſt this difficult law of ſelf-government: but to the due obſervance of it nothing ſhould ſeem more conducive than the habit of inuring the mind to conſideration; the want of which is a natural occaſion of vice and diſorder, and gives the paſſions an unbounded licence. The intemperance of our paſſions is no otherwiſe to be cured or reſtrained, than by a reſolution to reſtrain them: but this reſolution can only be formed by conſidering, that a regard to intereſt, decency, or duty, requires us ſo to act: Conſideration, then, or a right uſe of reaſon, is our only remedy.

Many there are, who, inattentive to the monitions of reaſon or conſcience, take the paſſions for their moral inſtructors, and aſk their inclinations what is right; who never enter into any ſelf-expoſtulation, and avoid nothing ſo much as ſerious converſe with themſelves. While we act in this manner, hardly can even a miracle reclaim us from the error of our ways. But if, as rational beings, we would govern, rather than be governed by, our paſſions; it muſt be neceſſary often to retire into ourſelves, and in ſome calm hour of reflection to review the ſtate of the heart; and if any faulty paſſion appears to have got poſſeſſion or admittance there, to view and conſider it in that juſt light in which

Reaſon, ſedate and uninfluenced, will repreſent it; to obſerve its nature, its tendency; to purſue it through its train of conſequences; and then a detection of its guilt, or danger may incline us to attempt an oppoſition to it, and may enable us to ſucceed in it. For paſſions however ſtrong and vigorous by nature, may be checked in their growth by timely care and prudent oppoſition. If we are attentive to acquire ſuch a habit of conſideration as may enable us to form juſt reflections on the nature and tendency of any paſſion, and the conſequences of compliance with it, we may gradually correct and break its ſtrength, till, however headſtrong and untractable at firſt, it may at length tamely obey the rein, and ſubmit to the guidance and diſcipline of reaſon.

Let us then accuſtom ourſelves to deliberate before we act: let us form our conduct on this fixed principle, That reaſon, not paſſion, ſhould be the guide of life: that reaſon is a faithful mirror, which reflects juſt images of things; but that every paſſion, like a falſe medium, miſrepreſents them: that when a ſtorm of paſſion riſes in us, it always obſcures the light of the ſoul, and clouds the underſtanding: that its commotions deceive and miſlead: that the mind agitated by paſſion, can no more form a true judgment of things, than a troubled ſea can reflect to the eye a diſtinct picture of objects: that our ſecond calm reflections often diſapprove and refute what has been ſuggeſted by our firſt inclinations: that we ought never, therefore, to give ear to the ſudden, precipitate ſuggeſtions of any paſſion; but to wait till reaſon can offer its ſafer and wiſer counſels, by which alone our happineſs can be ſecured. We may approve the paſſions while they are temperate, while they flow with a gentle and equal current in their proper channel; but knowing how apt they are to riſe with ſudden impetuoſity, we ſhould always be attentive to prevent the violence of the ſtream from breaking down thoſe bounds wherein it ought to be confined.

We ſhould obſerve, with a watchful eye, all our paſſions, deſires and affections; keep a conſtant guard on every avenue to the heart, and be careful to oppoſe the admittance of any wrong inclination. And though evil thoughts

thoughts and desires may sometimes escape our vigilance, and intrude unexpectedly upon us; though it may not always be in our power to keep the passages to the heart so well guarded, as to prevent irregular passions from sometimes entering uninvited into the mind; yet we may always refuse to receive or entertain them: in which lies our chief security; for if we once admit and give them a favourable reception, or comply with their first counsels, we know not where they will stop, or to what fatal and dangerous excesses they may seduce us. It highly concerns us therefore, to "keep our heart with all diligence."

And in order to succeed in this arduous, but important work, let us to our own efforts add our supplications to HIM who alone can order the unruly wills and affections of sinful men; who formed the heart, and can turn as he pleases all its springs of action: and let us implore his assistance in regulating its movements, and reducing all our sentiments, inclinations, and passions, into an habitual subordination to reason; that, after having enjoyed the present advantages of a virtuous mind, of a regular state of the heart and affections, we may hereafter be deemed worthy of a place in that Kingdom of Reason to come, that region of moral and intellectual felicity, where the inferior principles of our nature shall never again rebel against the supreme; where the law of Sense shall no more war against the law of our Mind; and where the present contest between Reason and Passion shall terminate in everlasting harmony and peace.

SERMON XIII.

On Afflictions.

Job v. 6, 7.

Although affliction cometh not forth of the duſt, neither doth trouble ſpring out of the ground: yet man is born unto trouble, as the ſparks fly upward.

EVERY man, by a proper uſe of thoſe powers of underſtanding and diſcernment which are common to our nature, may clearly diſcover, not only that there is a God, who created and governs the world, but alſo that he is a Being ſupremely good and beneficent. We need not ſeek far for evidences of his goodneſs: for to it we owe ourſelves, our being; nor can we juſtly aſcribe our creation to any other principle. The Almighty did not create us by neceſſity or compulſion; for he is himſelf ſupreme. He did not confer on us our being without ſome plan or deſign; for his wiſdom is infinite. He did not ſend us into the world for any advantage to be derived to himſelf; for, infinitely ſuperior, his happineſs cannot be dependent on us. It was, then, the redundancy of his own goodneſs that gave birth to creation. The happineſs of his creatures was doubtleſs his object, when he gave them their exiſtence; nor can we conceive any other end he can have in view in his providence and government of them.

Why then, it has been often aſked, why is miſery permitted to enter into the creation, to interrupt its harmony, to deface its beauty, and counteract the plan of the Creator? If *affliction cometh not forth of the duſt, nor trouble ſpring out of the ground*, (i. e. if they are not the effects of chance and accident, or of fate and neceſſity), whence is it that *man is born to trouble*, which is as natural to him as it is for *ſparks to fly upward*;—as it is for heavy bodies to fall, and the lighter to aſcend? Whence all thoſe numerous tribes of diſeaſes, and thoſe various ſpecies of affliction, which we may often obſerve in others, and often feel in ourſelves? Is it poſſible that a world which exhibits

exhibits ſuch a multiplicity of ſcenes of ſorrow, can be under the care and ſuperintendance of a Being whoſe attributes exclude every poſſibility of delighting in the miſeries of his creatures? Can ſuch numberleſs ſtreams of evil be ever flowing from the Fountain of Good? How different is the face of things from what we ſhould previouſly and without experience have expected to ſee in a world created, conducted, and ſuperintended by infinite and unerring Goodneſs?

To obviate theſe difficulties, ſome of the Heathens, obſerving what to them appeared careleſs and irregular ſtrokes of chance and fortune in the plan of nature, inferred, that theſe could not be the operation of a ſkilful and unerring hand; and that the world, therefore, was not under the care and direction of an all-powerful Superintendent: that it was beneath the majeſty of HIM whoſe throne is in Heaven to humble himſelf to behold the things that are on earth; and that the inſpection and ſuperintendance of human affairs was inconſiſtent with that abſolutely perfect tranquility from which every care was to be excluded. Other philoſophers, in order to reconcile the miſeries of his creatures with the goodneſs of the Creator, ſuppoſed that the ſouls of men had exiſted in a former ſtate, and that all the evils and ſufferings of this life were to be conſidered as inflictions for crimes committed in their ſtate of pre-exiſtence. Others, for the ſame purpoſe, framed an hypotheſis of two ſupreme, coeternal, and coequal beings, acting in oppoſition to each other; the one infinitely good, and diſpoſed to bleſs mankind with every felicity; the other infinitely evil, the author of all the misfortunes and miſeries that afflict human life.

But for the ſolution of this difficulty, we muſt have recourſe to the ſacred writings, which give us a different account of the origin of thoſe evils that afflict mankind. They inform us, that, at the creation, the divine goodneſs eminently diſplayed itſelf in a moſt glorious and delightful ſcene; that the new-formed world, and new-created man, were what GOD ſaw to be good, perfect in their kind, ſuch as it became abſolute and perfect goodneſs to create: but that man did not long continue to be what his Creator had made him; that, together with

the innocence, he forfeited the felicity of paradiſe; and that his diſobedience opened all thoſe avenues of pain and ſorrow that lead to, and terminate in, the grave. Although we ſee not, then, the ſame happy ſtate of things as exiſted at the birth of the world, we are not from thence to infer, with ſome of the Heathens, that we are not the objects of an infinitely good Providence; but we are rather to conclude, that the happineſs of paradiſe is not to be obtained without its innocence; that an abſolute and perfect ſtate of reſt and tranquility here on earth is incompatible with our corruption; and that the degenerate ſtate of our nature requires ſuch correction and diſcipline, ſuch an intermixture of good and of evil, as we now obſerve and experience in the world.

The preſent ſtate of our being is to be conſidered only as a ſtate of trial, or ſchool of virtue: the ſoul is now only in its minority, in the infancy of its exiſtence; in order, by proper diſcipline, to be educated and trained up to piety and virtue, and fitted for an admiſſion into the heavenly paradiſe. Sovereign Goodneſs ſtill holds the ſceptre, and rules the world: but juſtice and wiſdom are its miniſters; and under their adminiſtration, both hopes and fears, corrections and favours, rewards and puniſhments, are equally employed, and alike intended to promote our happineſs. Afflictions, we are aſſured, far from being indications of God's neglecting and diſregarding his creatures, are expreſſions of his paternal care and affection. The inflictions of Heaven are never ſent, but with a merciful intention; and certain it is, that all unneceſſary ſufferings, ſufferings that have no ſalutary tendency, no relation or ſubſerviency to happineſs preſent or future, can find no place under the government of an infinitely perfect and good Being.

In the further proſecution of this ſubject, I ſhall offer ſome conſiderations to explain the goodneſs of the Deity in the afflictions of his creatures, by pointing out ſome general moral or religious advantages that may reſult from them.

I. Although the object of the Deity, in his creation, providence, and government of mankind, is doubtleſs their

their happineſs; yet as it is not conſiſtent with his moral perfections to confer happineſs indiſcriminately on all, but only on the upright, the virtuous, and obedient, his goodneſs admits of an eaſy vindication in the ſufferings he inflicts; becauſe they have a natural tendency to form us to virtue, by diſpoſing the mind to conſideration; which is indeed all that in moſt of us is requiſite to render us wiſer and better. Conſideration, by inclining us to attend to the ſilent inſtructions of reaſon and true wiſdom, ſeldom fails to impreſs the mind with ideas of religion and duty. It is not ſo much from infidelity, as inadvertence, not from want of conviction, but want of conſideration, that the ſinner proceeds in iniquity. It is not becauſe the principles of religion appear doubtful; it is becauſe they appear not at all, becauſe he allows himſelf not leiſure to deliberate, and reflect upon his duties and obligations. Sin cannot ſtand the teſt of conſideration. *I thought upon my ways*, ſays the Pſalmiſt, *and turned my feet unto thy teſtimonies; I made haſte, and delayed not to keep thy commandments:* implying, that a reformation of life is the certain and immediate conſequence of conſidering our ways.

Sufferings, then, by inclining the mind to be ſerious and conſiderate, have a natural tendency to reform the diſobedient and inadvertent, to confirm and improve the virtues of the good, and to ſecure and advance the future happineſs of both.

II. Amidſt the flow of proſperity and eaſe, we are too apt to exclude from our thoughts that All-gracious BEING from whom we receive them. But ſufferings remind us of his providence, and of our dependence. And this they do by the conviction they bring, that our ſtrength is but weakneſs; that we are ſubject to infirmities which we cannot remove, to wants we cannot ſupply, and expoſed to various accidents and dangers which no ſagacity can foreſee, and no prudence avert. Where, then, ſhall we ſeek for ſanctuary in the needful time of trouble, whither fly for protection, but to the Almighty Guardian of his creatures, who is neither ſlow to hear, nor impotent to ſave, all ſuch as call upon him faithfully? To HIM, the Diſpenſer of happineſs, the Parent of good, Nature prompts us to addreſs ourſelves

ſelves to ſupplicate his aid, and implore his protecting hand. We find the royal Pſalmiſt, under afflictions, ever applying to GOD for help; and it is to his ſufferings we are indebted for a conſiderable part of that treaſure of devotion which he left behind him. *In the time of my trouble*, ſays he, *I ſought the Lord: When I am in heavineſs I will think upon God.*

And ſo natural is this application to the Deity in circumſtances of diſtreſs, that even the moſt diſſolute and profligate; thoſe who on other occaſions would ſay, *What is the Almighty, that we ſhould ſerve him? and what profit ſhall we have if we pray unto him?* when diſtreſs and anguiſh come upon them, and there is none to help; even *they* feel an inward, inſtinctive, almoſt irreſiſtible, impulſe to call upon GOD; to make their humble appeal to the Father of Mercies; to pour out their fears, their dangers, and their troubles, to him; and to fly for protection to that Power who alone can grant it. Like the prodigal in the goſpel, when compelled by ſufferings, and ready to periſh, then it is we take the reſolution to ariſe and go to our Father, and acknowledge our unworthineſs. Trouble and affliction are indeed perſuaſive teachers, and effectually inſtruct us to look up to GOD, and place our dependence on him, the ſole diſpoſer of all events.

III. Sufferings have a tendency to correct in us a too partial and confined attachment to the world, and to extend and elevate our thoughts to heaven. They who meet no misfortune, and ſee all things ſmile around them, and with-hold not their heart from any joy, are ready to conclude, that it is good for them to be here; are inclined to fix their affections where their treaſure is; and to think no farther about futurity than only to infer, that *to-morrow ſhall be as this day, or much more abundant*. The wiſdom of Providence, therefore, has appointed affliction and trouble to intermingle in all human affairs; has been pleaſed to chequer our years with proſperous and adverſe viciſſitudes, in order that we might be induced to transfer our affections to things above, and to elevate our hearts to thoſe manſions where only true joy is to be found. We might perhaps have looked no farther than the pleaſures of this world,

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content with the little portion of imperfect enjoyment they afford, were it not for pains, diſeaſes, and misfortunes,—thoſe inſtructive monitors, which are ever reminding us, that this world was not meant by our Creator to be the ſcene of our felicity, but that we are to expect and look for it in another ſtate.

It may then appear, from what has been obſerved, that the troubles to which we are born, are perfectly conſiſtent with the divine goodneſs, as they are conducive to, and promotive of, our final happineſs, by yielding the fruits of righteouſneſs to them that are exerciſed thereby.

What obligations, then, do we owe, what habitual gratitude, what reverential affection is juſtly due to the Deity, under all his diſpenſations, whether indulgent or ſevere, whether he comforts or afflicts, whether he grieves or relieves us; ſince all his appointments, his inflictions or bleſſings, are equally intended to operate in our favour, and to terminate in our happineſs!

It is, doubtleſs, in the power of the Almighty to ſecure us a ſmooth and eaſy paſſage through this vale of life; to bleſs us in all our ways; and, by his providential interpoſition, to prevent every occaſion of ſorrow, and to guard us from the numerous evils that lie in wait and often meet us in our pilgrimage through the world. But what his power may grant, his wiſdom ſees fit to withhold. His providence directs all events in the wiſeſt manner, and for the happieſt purpoſes; but we, who cannot trace the remote conſequences of events, can but imperfectly judge of them, and know not with certainty what is good or evil, what is beneficial or hurtful to us. If tranquility, pleaſure, health and ſucceſs, render us negligent of religion, forgetful of God, of ourſelves, the better part of ourſelves, our ſouls, they are undoubtedly evils. If ſufferings awake us to conſideration and amendment, and teach us to look up to God, and be above all things ſolicitous to recommend ourſelves to his favour, it is good for us to be thus afflicted; and happy the days of adverſity that are productive of theſe effects.

In our future ſtate, when we take a retroſpective view of our lives, they will appear in a light very different from

from that in which we ſee them at preſent. What we now conſider as misfortunes and afflictions, will appear to have been mercies and bleſſings; and we ſhall ſee that the intentions of the Deity were benevolent, when his inflictions ſeemed ſevere. And certain it is, that our ſtate or condition is often then the happieſt and beſt for us, when we are apt to judge it the worſt; that we have often the beſt reaſon to acquieſce in thoſe appointments of Providence at which we are moſt inclined to grieve; and that we ought to be moſt thankful, when we moſt complain. For we form our judgment of events from preſent appearances only, without being able to penetrate into their remote conſequences, that lie hid in the boſom of futurity.

Let it be our determination, then, to meet every diſpenſation of Providence with the moſt ſubmiſſive reſignation to the will of that ſupremely gracious Sovereign of nature, whoſe unerring wiſdom can alone determine what is good or evil for us; whoſe unbounded goodneſs will direct all things finally to the happineſs of his creatures; and can infinitely overbalance the light afflictions of this world, which are but for a ſeaſon, with an exceeding and eternal weight of glory.

SERMON

SERMON XIV.

On the Fear of God.

Prov. xvi. 6.

By the fear of the Lord men depart from evil.

FEAR is a paſſion inherent in our nature, and inſeparable from it. From the influence of this principle, none, not the moſt intrepid, are exempt. They who, by an uncommon fortitude of mind, are ſuperior to the apprehenſions of danger, and *fear not them who can kill the body*, have yet other objects of this paſſion, and may fear cenſure, guilt, diſeaſe, diſhonour;—or may have their fears for others, if not for themſelves. The one univerſal object of fear is, or ought to be, that Almighty Being who is the arbiter of our fate, and ordereth all things both in heaven and earth. But this fear, in different perſons, will differ, according to the ſtate and diſpoſition of the mind. The ſinner, oppreſſed by a ſenſe of guilt and a deſpondency of mercy, repreſents that Beſt of Beings as an object of terror, and dreads as an enemy the Friend and Father of mankind. But this is a ſpecies of fear which I hope none of us may ever experience, and is very different from that which is a Chriſtian and a rational duty.

Let us then enquire, *1ſt*, What is that fear of God which religion recommends and requires; *2dly*, What conſiderations are proper to excite and produce this fear; and, *laſtly*, Let us obſerve its effects and influence on our manners.

I. The fear of God which Religion recommends and requires, is an ingenious principle, very different from that terror which reſults from the idea of our ſubjection to a being void of mercy, and poſſeſſed of power to inflict evils which we can neither oppoſe nor avert. Such a fear of the Divine Being as leads to deſpondency, as extinguiſhes the conſideration of his paternal goodneſs, and blots out from the mind every liberal ſentiment of him,

him, muſt ariſe from erroneous or partial conceptions of his nature. If we miſconceive of God, if we repreſent him under forbidden appearances, as a ſovereign ſeated always on his throne of judgment, ſevere in his laws, inflexible in his juſtice, and armed with power for the purpoſes of vengeance; if we thus admit falſe repreſentations of the Divine Majeſty; or if we form partial and defective conceptions of him, and dwell altogether upon his natural, without aſſociating with them his moral, perfections; if we conſider only his irreſiſtible power and abſolute dominion, but forget that his dominion and power are never exerted but under the direction of infinite goodneſs; or if we ſelect the more awful even of the moral perfections, ſuch are juſtice inflexible, and holineſs unſpotted, without taking into the idea the milder properties of mercy unbounded, and goodneſs univerſal; no wonder if a pious reverential awe degenerate into a ſervile and miſerable dread. If we thus view the ſupreme Being through the perſpectives of ſuſpicion and terror; if we conſider him as extreme to mark what is done amiſs; as inclined to pour out the vials of his wrath as often and as ſoon as we offend; as making no favourable allowances for the infirmity of our nature; as an inexorable Judge, whom neither repentance can appeaſe, nor tears ſoften;—deſpondency and terror muſt take inevitable poſſeſſion of our minds, and *an horrible dread muſt overwhelm them.*

But ſuch a fear, derived from miſtaken and diſhonourable ideas of his nature, cannot be the duty which God requires, nor be an homage acceptable to him. This is not to fear God in the manner that Religion preſcribes: it is to fear a viſionary being ſubſtituted in his place; it is to terrify ourſelves with a phantom that no where exiſts, but in a diſordered imagination; for there is no ſuch real exiſtence, as a Being poſſeſſed of infinite power and dominion, that is not conducted by perfect goodneſs, unerring wiſdom, and unbounded mercy. Very different from this is the fear which Religion inculcates and enjoins. It is founded on juſt ſentiments and a due eſteem of the Deity, in believing him to be what he is, the righteous Governor and equitable Judge of the world; powerful indeed, but perfectly wiſe, and good, and benevolent,

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and merciful; who will indeed chaſtiſe and puniſh tranſgreſſors, but whoſe view in the infliction of puniſhment is the happineſs of his creatures. A true fear of God conſiſts in a juſt ſenſe of our dependence upon him; in the reverence naturally due to a being ſo great, and a character ſo perfect; in a fear of offending ſo much goodneſs; in apprehenſions of forfeiting his favour; in ſuch an awful veneration as inſpires obedience, urges us to ſhun every occaſion of incurring his diſpleaſure, and makes us afraid to offend, becauſe unwilling to diſpleaſe.

Religion teaches us, that God is the beſt and the greateſt, the moſt amiable as well as awful of beings; that as is his majeſty, ſo alſo is his mercy; that he is our guardian and parent, who watches over us with paternal care, ſupplies our wants, aſſiſts our frailty, protects our weakneſs, is merciful to our failings, and corrects with compaſſion. If the Divine Being be repreſented to our minds under this character, we ſhall neither deſpair of his mercy, nor diſhonour his nature, by making it the object of a diſingenuous and ſervile fear, and paying him ſuch an illiberal extorted homage, as the victor receives from the captive, or the tyrant from his ſlave. God is in the ſcriptures moſt frequently deſcribed as the Father of his creatures; and the appellation by which we are inſtructed to addreſs him is, "Our Father who is in heaven." And agreeably to this idea, the fear which Religion recommends, reſembles in kind that reſpectful awe, that filial reverence, with which children ought to honour a wiſe and good parent, but exalted and refined to its higheſt purity and perfection. This fear, which we all owe to the Parent of the Univerſe, will expreſs itſelf by every reverential act of obedience and homage to him,—by an attentive and vigilant compliance with his will;—and will deter us from offending him, from apprehenſions of his diſpleaſure. But this ſacred fear may, notwithſtanding, admit a mixture of filial confidence, founded on that paternal benignity with which, as a father, he regardeth us his children, pouring down his bleſſings upon us, multiplying his mercies with a liberal and profuſe hand, and gradually conducting us by the influences of his grace, in the way

pointed

pointed out by unerring wiſdom, to the utmoſt felicity our nature can admit.

The fear of God, therefore, that fear which religion recommends, is not a ſervile principle, is not a ſlaviſh, extorted dread, but a filial reverence; ſuppoſes in its Object, mercy and goodneſs, as well as dominion and power; and has nothing dreadful in it, but when conſcious guilt arms it with unnatural terrors. It is accompanied with an humble confidence in God, and an affection to his ſervice; and is very different from that ſpecies of fear which is the gloomy imagery of a miſtaken, a melancholy, or a guilty mind. There is nothing in a true idea of God, that carries terror in it, but to the guilty; nothing but what ſhould rather inſpire hope, and confidence, and joy. A true fear of God has no tendency to enervate and oppreſs the mind with perpetual alarms and apprehenſions; but, on the contrary, to ſtrengthen and animate, and render it ſuperior to all other fears. He who fears God, need fear none but him.

II. I proceed to obſerve what conſiderations are proper to excite and produce in us a juſt fear and reverence of God. And here we may obſerve, that the majeſty, dignity, and various perfections of the Supreme Being, all conſpire to form in his creatures a religious fear. For if ſuperior human excellence, dignity, or goodneſs, commands no ſmall degree of reverence, how much more awful ideas ought a ſenſe of the greatneſs and adorable attributes of the Almighty to impreſs on a ſerious and conſiderate mind! His greatneſs is inſcrutable; the moſt enlarged underſtanding cannot comprehend nor find out the Almighty to perfection. He far tranſcends, not only our nature, but our conceptions; is infinitely above all that we are, and all that we can think. When we reflect, that this infinitely great and awful is alſo an infinitely righteous and holy Being; and that he ſurrounds us with his preſence; that his eye, purer than to behold iniquity, penetrates the inmoſt receſſes of the mind; that every action, and every ſentiment, lies open to his inſpection; and that he ſees not the outward act only, but the firſt conception of guilt, with all its gradual progreſs in the heart; how religi-

religiouſly ought we to purſue the Pſalmiſt's advice, and ſtand in awe, and ſin not! Eſpecially if to thoſe conſiderations we add his omnipotent power and dominion. For our ſouls and bodies, our life and death, are in his hands; and he has power to ſave and power to deſtroy. On him we are dependant for all we have, and all we are. By a word he called us into being, and by a word may remand us to our original nothing, or appoint inflictions ſuited to our offences. For he cannot be interrupted or oppoſed in the execution of his will: *He doth whatſoever pleaſeth him, both in the armies of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth; the pillars of heaven tremble at his reproof; the thunder of his power who can withſtand?* A power ſo abſolute, ſo mighty, and irreſiſtible, cannot be contemplated without an awful reverence, even by thoſe whoſe integrity and obedience might inſpire the beſt hopes of its protection.

But it will ſtill add to our fear and veneration of the Almighty, when we turn our eyes from his nature to our own, and obſerve its various frailties and imperfections, its immenſe diſtance from the higheſt order of created beings; for the chain of creatures aſcends probably by a regular gradation from man, through various claſſes of ſuperior intelligences, in the ſame manner as it gradually deſcends from man to the moſt imperfect of animals. When we reflect, that we are the loweſt, perhaps, in the ſcale of intellectual beings, and ſunk ſtill lower by our degeneracy; when we conſider how much our nature is ſtained and polluted with guilt; and that the beſt of men, nay, that the very heavens, are not pure in the ſight of God; that he chargeth even his angels with folly, and that thoſe moſt holy and unoffending beings veil their faces before him;——how ought the contemplation of our frail nature, by infinite deſcents inferior to his, make all the earth to fear the Lord, and all the inhabitants of the world to ſtand in awe of him!—Which leads me,

III. Laſtly, to obſerve the effects and influence of this principle of religious fear. And the natural effect of it will be, an univerſal attention to the divine laws. *By the fear of the Lord men depart from evil.* The true ground of morality and religion is, the intrinſic reaſonable-

ſonableneſs, the eſſential and immutable rectitude, of the duties they preſcribe. For moral good and evil depend not on any uncertain, fluctuating, arbitrary principle; but have a fixed, permanent, immoveable foundation in nature. Gratitude and piety to God; probity, juſtice, fidelity, and benevolence to men; are abſolutely and in their own nature right and good, worthy to be choſen, fit to be practiſed, antecedently to any command, and independently of all promiſes, rewards, or ſanctions whatſoever. Reaſon and conſcience bid us do what is right, whether any proſpect of recompence be ſet before us or not. If the world could be ſuppoſed to ſubſiſt without the ſuperintending providence, or even without the exiſtence of a God, moral good and evil, virtue and vice, would ſtill continue to be what they are; the one eſſentially excellent, the other unalterably blameworthy. But it muſt be owned, that in practice the principal ſupport of virtue among mankind, is an awful ſenſe of a ſupreme Sovereign and Judge of the world, who will finally reward what is worthy of reward, and puniſh what deſerves puniſhment. To his all-perfect and unerring mind, the intrinſic, eſſential excellence of moral goodneſs is a certain, and always ſufficient, motive of action. But it is too feeble an obligation to bind human beings, tempted and importuned as we are by our various paſſions to break looſe from it. We are not perfect and ſpiritual enough in our preſent ſtate, to be determined in all our actions, by the ſole conſideration of the rectitude and excellence of virtue. It is neceſſary that our ſenſe of duty ſhould be aided and invigorated by an habitual, awful impreſſion upon our minds, of an infinitely holy, juſt, and powerful Sovereign of nature, who, as certainly as there is a diſtinction between virtue and vice, will finally approve and reward the one, and diſapprove and puniſh the other.

This fear of God is the beginning of wiſdom,—the principle that gives its firſt admittance to the ſoul. And if this principle be fixed in our minds, it will be productive of an univerſal caution to abſtain from every action offenſive to our Maker, and of an habitual concern and ſolicitude to conform our whole conduct to his will.

will. We ſhall avoid all the artful diſguiſes of hypocriſy, as much as open and avowed profaneneſs; and our conduct will be equally juſt and correct in our retired hours, as when we appear on the public ſtage of the world; knowing that no ſhade of retirement, no cover of hypocriſy, no veil of darkneſs, can hide us from that all-ſeeing eye, under whoſe inſpection we live and move. This reverential fear of the Divine Being, eſtabliſhed upon rational grounds, will be a powerful motive to every virtue, and the moſt effectual preſervative from every ſin. *How ſhall I do this great evil, and ſin againſt God!* is the natural ſuggeſtion of a heart impreſſed with a religious fear.

Let us then habituate ourſelves to form ſuch juſt, awful, and elevated ideas of our Creator, as may give birth to an holy fear, tempered with a filial reſpect, and pious confidence in him; that we may neither diſhonour his greatneſs by want of reverence, nor affront his goodneſs by a ſervile dread and an extorted ſubmiſſion. Let us remember, that if we now poſſeſs our minds with a reverential fear, and live under an habitual veneration of him, we ſhall be admitted hereafter into that bliſsful ſtate, where perfect love will caſt out all abject fear; where we ſhall ſee GOD as he is, not armed with terrors, but ſurrounded with mercy; and ſhall approach him with the confidence of ſons, as well as the ſubmiſſion of creatures; where we ſhall offer to him an ingenuous ſervice, not proceeding from conſtraint or apprehenſions of his vengeance, but from juſt ſentiments of the amiableneſs of moral goodneſs, and deep impreſſions of holy gratitude to the author of our felicity; where our duty will be the free-will offering of our heart; where we ſhall ſerve GOD with liberal affections, and no mixture of a groſs and ſervile alloy ſhall debaſe the purity of our obedience; and where all diſingenuous motives of action being done away, the pureſt and beſt of principles, the love of GOD and goodneſs, ſhall actuate and animate us to endleſs ages.

SERMON XV.

Utility of the Light of REVELATION.

JOHN xii. 46.

I am come a light into the world, that whoſoever believeth in me ſhould not abide in darkneſs.

FROM theſe words it appears, that one principal intention of our Saviour's coming into the world was to be a light to thoſe who abide in darkneſs; i. e. to inſtruct thoſe who had only the aſſiſtances of natural reaſon to inform them of the principles of religion and the rules of duty. And hence I ſhall take occaſion to conſider the ſuperior advantage of the light or inſtruction afforded by the Chriſtian Revelation.

No revelation, we may be aſſured, would have been communicated to the world, if the aſſiſtances of natural reaſon had been entirely ſufficient; ſufficient in ſuch a ſenſe as to preclude the neceſſity or utility of a revelation. But the inſufficiency of reaſon and the conſequent utility of revelation, may appear from the hiſtory of all the nations of antiquity who have lived deſtitute of revealed inſtructions. How uncertain and how imperfect a progreſs we ſhould have made in our inquiries into religion, upon the ſtrength of our mere rational powers, may be collected from the errors and ignorance, the idolatries and ſuperſtitions of the Heathen world; which afford a ſad, but clear conviction, of the weakneſs of untutored reaſon. How abſurd were their conceptions of a Supreme Being! how unworthy of his greatneſs! how derogatory from the infinite excellence of his nature! Though the character of the DEITY is ſtrongly marked in the Creation,—and the ſtructure of both heaven and earth declares the exiſtence, wiſdom, and power, of the Almighty Architect; yet ſuch was the general corruption, that men, like the idols they worſhipped, which have eyes and ſee not, did not in fact diſcern that GOD who was ſo viſible in his works.

Judea

Judea was the ſingle province, the Hebrews the only people, who made the acknowledgment of one Supreme Being a fundamental article of their religion; whereas, in all other nations, polytheiſm and idolatry took place, and had an eſtabliſhment in their laws. Socrates, one of the beſt of men, was put to death by the Athenians, the moſt learned of the Heathens, for teaching the unity of GOD, and the ſpirituality of the worſhip due to him. From all the remaining monuments of Paganiſm, it appears, that their public worſhip was addreſſed to a multiplicity of deities: nor was there any injunction in any of their laws which required adoration to be paid to the Supreme GOD, and to him alone. The honour due to the Creator they transferred to his creatures; to the celeſtial bodies, and to brute animals; to inanimate and even imaginary beings; to paſſions and vices, to images and idols; to whatever folly could conceive, or fancy ſuggeſt. Any thing almoſt was worſhipped as a divinity, except the Divine Being himſelf. This practice, to the diſhonour of human reaſon, was admitted, not only in countries rude and ignorant, but in the more civilized and much admired nations of Greece and Rome. It has been obſerved, that in thoſe nations idolatry ſeemed to gather ſtrength and prevail, as they advanced in civilization and in learning. Though ſcience flouriſhed among them, yet they became ſtill more and more addicted to the moſt abſurd idolatries, as well as the moſt infamous vices; both of which had made an amazing progreſs at the time of our Saviour's appearance. No wonder, indeed, that polytheiſm and idolatry laid the foundation of the groſſeſt and vileſt corruptions. The moſt infamous immoralities were but the natural conſequences of a religion wherein they had examples of vice in the acknowledged objects of their religious worſhip. Where Vice was honoured with temples and altars, Virtue could expect few votaries.

Some philoſophers indeed there were, who, by the ſtrength of ſuperior genius, ſaw through the folly of the general ſuperſtition. But even their light was darkneſs. They lamented the ignorance and blindneſs of the vulgar; but that ſagacity which detected the errors of others, could not of itſelf inveſtigate the truth. Even

Athens, the ſeat of literature, where was the great reſort of the learned, where the antient philoſophy received its higheſt cultivation, even this ſchool of wiſdom waited for an apoſtle to give her information of the unknown GOD. Here, if any where, in a city eminent for letters, and an age enlightened by ſcience, the moſt correct and accurate ideas of GOD and religion that the powers of reaſon could frame, might be expected to be found. Here it might be ſuppoſed they would have got above the abſurd idolatries and groſs ſuperſtitions of the more uncivilized and ignorant nations. But we find, that in fact it was otherwiſe; and that St. Paul's ſpirit was ſtirred within him when he ſaw the city wholly given up to idolatry.

To the cure of theſe diſorders the preſcriptions of philoſophy were applied in vain: for philoſophers, who ſhould have corrected the errors of the people, widely differed among themſelves. Some of them ſcarce admitted the exiſtence of a GOD; and ſuppoſed, that the world might owe its birth and formation to a fortuitous concourſe and coalition of atoms. Some admitted his being; but denied his ſuperintendance and government of the world. Some acknowledged a general, but rejected a particular providence. Some aſcribed all events to blind, undirected chance; ſome to abſolute, unalterable fate; and others thought, that a certainty was not to be obtained in theſe or other opinions, and profeſſed or pretended to univerſal doubt. Thus divided in the moſt important principles of religion, they conſequently differed in the duties of it. With regard to thoſe who denied a providence, evident it is, that ſubmiſſion to GOD, dependence upon his goodneſs, gratitude for his benefits, or reſignation to his appointments, could make no part of their ſyſtem of morals. And though indeed, the ſocial and civil duties on which the peace, and order, and welfare of ſocieties more immediately depend, were generally admitted; yet in the duties relative to the regulation and government of appetites and paſſions, they were far from being agreed.

If, then, men of diſtinguiſhed genius, who had equal abilities and inclination to cultivate moral ſcience, were thus

thus bewildered, and unable to aſcertain the firſt principles of religion; no wonder if the vulgar, the far greater part of mankind, who had neither leiſure, nor inclination, nor abilities, to purſue ſuch diſquiſitions, were ſunk into the groſſeſt errors and corruptions. In this benighted ſtate of the world, before the Sun of Righteouſneſs aroſe, or the rays of the Goſpel ſhone upon mankind, they travelled on through life like wanderers in the dark, with doubtful ſteps, amidſt danger and diſcomfort, without a guide to conduct them, without a proſpect of the end of their journey, and with imperfect glimmerings of the way that led to it. Some light, then, ſome aſſiſtances, were plainly wanting, beyond what the powers of reaſon could ſupply. And at this critical ſeaſon, when the nations of the world were ſunk into a deplorable ſtate of error in opinions, and corruption in morals, the Father of mercies, by a gracious interpoſition of his providence, favoured them with a Revelation, which not only inſtructed them in the Exiſtence of one eternal and infinite Being, the author and governor of all things,—but communicated juſt and worthy apprehenſions of his Nature and Attributes; rectified the numerous errors that were ſo widely diſperſed, and had ſo long prevailed; and pointed out the paths to peace and happineſs, by ſetting before them the precepts of GOD and nature, in their genuine uncorrupted purity.

If we look back and contemplate the moral world, in its firſt ages, before it was enlightened by the beams of Revelation, it appears like the earth in its original diſordered ſtate, when it was without form, and void, and darkneſs was upon the face of the deep. But as ſoon as the ſpirit of GOD moved, and the lights of Heaven ſhone upon it, regularity and order ſucceeded, and its night was turned into day.

But the utility of the Chriſtian Revelation will further appear, if we conſider, that though we ſhould even admit, what was not the fact, that Reaſon by its native, unaſſiſted powers, might be capable of acquiring juſt ideas of the nature of GOD, his attributes and providence, and of forming an accurate and complete ſyſtem of the duties we owe to him and to each other; yet it could not with certainty diſcover what would be

the reward of duty, or what the future conſequences of tranſgreſſion; and could not therefore know what was neceſſary to be known, to give an effectual ſupport and encouragement to virtue.

It is to be obſerved, that the true ground, the primary foundation, of religion and morality, is the intrinſic rectitude, propriety, and reaſonableneſs of the duties they preſcribe; which are in their own nature right and good, worthy to be regarded, fit to be practiſed, whether we have any proſpect or promiſe of a future recompence or not. But yet it cannot be diſowned, that ſuch recompence is requiſite for the ſupport of virtue; and that the obligation to thoſe duties is highly enforced by the authoritative Revelation of the divine will, and by the diſcoveries made in the Goſpel of the nature and certainty of that final felicity which will be the future reward of obedience, without which the cauſe of virtue muſt neceſſarily languiſh. In the preſent ſtate of the world, where corruption and diſorder prevail, where virtue often fails to conduct its votaries to happineſs, nor does vice always plunge its followers in miſery; where good men often ſuffer, and ſuffer for their virtue, and wicked men proſper, and proſper even by means of iniquity;—in ſuch a ſituation, the only ſufficient and effectual motive to duty is the proſpect of a future retribution; the expectation of a heavenly tribunal, where virtue is ſure to be happy in the approbation of the Judge of the whole earth, and vice to ſuffer the effects of his diſpleaſure.

But as a ſtate of future exiſtence was looked upon in the Gentile world to be at beſt dark and problematical; and as an habitual regard to it, though it be the happieſt principle that can poſſeſs the mind, was never recommended among them as a rule of conduct; the moral behaviour of the wiſeſt and beſt of them, not founded on the firm baſis of that principle, muſt have been unſtable, and have varied with every paſſion and inclination. For nothing but faith in a future retribution, nothing but a firm belief that their labour will not be in vain, can keep mankind ſteady and immovable in their integrity. Take away the hopes of futurity, and it will be in the power of every common cala-

calamity to ſhake the firmeſt virtue. For what power or principle would be left in the mind to induce even the good man to ſuffer in the cauſe of virtue, if he had no proſpect of any other conſequence than certain ſuffering in this world, and utter extinction hereafter?

The future exiſtence of human nature appeared doubtful even to philoſophers of the greateſt name among the Heathens, who frequently expreſſed their want of ſome clearer evidence to fix in their minds a firm perſuaſion of it. They endeavoured, indeed, to carry their views beyond this ſhort vale of life; they ſtood upon the ſhore, and eyed the immenſe ocean of eternity that lay before them; but clouds and darkneſs ſoon terminated the proſpect. The light of the Goſpel happily diſpelled thoſe clouds and that darkneſs, extricated mankind from the perplexity in which they formerly lay, and opened a view into eternity. We are not now left to dark and fruitleſs conjectures about immortality, without confidence in our hopes, or conſolation in our fears; but have the fulleſt aſſurances of an everlaſting happineſs prepared for good men in a future ſtate, and the moſt expreſs declarations concerning the puniſhment which will be inflicted on the wicked; the expediency and importance of which, to the intereſts of religion and virtue, muſt be acknowledged. Theſe are the ſtrongeſt conceivable motives to rectitude of manners, and muſt operate upon the mind with all the force that is compatible with the freedom of human actions. But if even theſe are found too weak to call men off from criminal purſuits; if even theſe are inſufficient to procure a general attention to virtue; how vain were unaſſiſted Reaſon, how ineffectual its counſels! Of what avail any ſpeculative contemplations on the moral fitneſs, or excellence, or amiableneſs, of virtue, if the certain aſſurance of a happy or miſerable Futurity cannot always prevail with us to turn from our evil ways!

Other doctrines there are of great importance to mankind, concerning which the Heathen world ſtood in great need of inſtruction, and which have been elucidated and aſcertained by the Goſpel; ſuch as thoſe relating to the Provi-

Providence of God,—the Worſhip that ought to be rendered to him,—moral Duty conſidered in its juſt extent,—the terms of our Acceptance with God, and the means of reconciliation when we have offended him; which time will not permit now to be fully conſidered.

I ſhall only obſerve at preſent, that the advantage of the light communicated by the Goſpel may in general appear from this conſideration, That though God is no reſpecter of perſons; though he is the equal Father of all; and the virtuous Heathen, who ſincerely endeavours to pleaſe God, doubtleſs will pleaſe him: yet as the Chriſtian poſſeſſes ſuperior aſſiſtances and opportunities of moral inſtruction and improvement; as the moſt effectual diſſuaſives from every ſpecies of vice, and the moſt animating incitements to virtue and goodneſs, lie before him; he may in general be expected to approach nearer to moral perfection, than thoſe who had no future proſpect to operate upon their hopes and fears, to animate them to virtue, or deter them from vice. The Goſpel gives us ſuch information and lends ſuch aſſiſtance, as muſt, if not wilfully rejected, give us great advantages above the Heathen world.

If, then, our heavenly Father has been pleaſed to favour us with diſtinguiſhed regard, by diſperſing the clouds that hung over the Gentile world, and bidding the light of the Goſpel ſhine among us, whereby the paths of virtue and happineſs are pointed out with more clearneſs and certainty than to thoſe who were guided by the leſſer light of nature only,—how thankful ought we to be for this light? and how careful to direct our ſteps by it! how attentive to that wiſdom which deſcended from above, and is tranſfuſed into the ſacred pages,—which reveals to us every thing we are concerned to know, in order to be wiſe in our moſt important intereſt, wiſe unto ſalvation!

Let, then, the ſacred writings which convey this light,—the ſureſt guides to immortality, the words of eternal life, pure as the place from whence they were derived, wiſe and good as the Spirit who formed them; thoſe holy oracles in which God announces his will to his creatures, in which our hopes are aſſured of everlaſting

ing felicity, and our actions directed to the attainment of it; let theſe employ our frequent meditations; let them be our delight, and our counſellors; and let it be our pious care, ſo to read, learn, and inwardly digeſt them, that we may ever hold faſt the bleſſed hope of everlaſting life which they have given us in our Saviour CHRIST.

SERMON XVI.

GOD's Judgments a Motive to HOLINESS.

Preached at Edinburgh, February 6, 1756, on the day appointed by public authority for a general faſt, after the earthquake at Liſbon.

ISAIAH xxvi. 9. latter part.

When thy judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world will learn righteouſneſs.

AT this awful ſeaſon, when the divine judgments are in the world, when *God has ariſen to ſhake terribly the earth*, when ſome nations have ſeverely felt his avenging hand, and many others have trembled under the apprehenſions of it, we are juſtly required by the authority of our Sovereign, and loudly called upon by the voice of Religion, to humble ourſelves before the Almighty RULER of the univerſe, to approach his throne of grace, and preſent our moſt fervent vows and ſupplications to him; our vows of future piety, our ſupplications for his protecting mercy.

The

The SOVEREIGN of the world has lately viſited ſome kingdoms with the moſt dreadful of his inflictions, has ſent notices of his judgments to the ends of the earth, and has given the inhabitants of this our iſland ſome merciful monitions to repent, leſt we likewiſe periſh. Ought we not then to attend with reverence to theſe awful intimations of Providence? Shall we not ſeriouſly weigh and conſider theſe meſſages from heaven? Hath GOD uttered his voice? let the earth, and all that dwell therein, ſtand in awe. He hath ſpoken, and *called the world from the riſing up of the ſun unto the going down thereof.*

GOD ſpeaks to mankind, not only in his revealed inſtructions, but in his works of creation and providence; and in theſe he ſpeaks to them in a language that is univerſal, intelligible to all nations and ages; a language *whoſe ſound goes out into all lands, and its words unto the ends of the world.* In this language, GOD has given men every where ample information of his nature and providence, his power, his wiſdom, his goodneſs, and occaſionally of his avenging juſtice. If he commands the ſword, the famine, the peſtilence, or any other meſſenger of his wrath, to go through a neighbouring land; what other conſtruction can we put upon the meſſage, than that we ought to repent, and turn unto GOD, leſt we alſo fall under the ſame condemnation? When he commiſſions his deſtroying angel to afflict his people, the deſign of the commiſſion is, to exhort them to obedience. When he viſits us with his judgments, the intention of theſe judgments is to admoniſh us to render ourſelves proper objects of his goodneſs and mercy.

In this light, the late viſitations from Heaven are conſidered by the authority which enjoined the religious obſervance of this day. The ſame conſtruction is put upon the divine judgments by all nations; and this conſtruction the prophet ſuppoſes in the text to be ſo natural and obvious, that he lays it down as an undoubted maxim, That when GOD's judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of it will learn righteouſneſs.

Let it not be urged, that thoſe public calamities, which the common reaſon of mankind has ever taught them to conſider

conſider as divine judgments, ought not to be apprehended to proceed from a particular interpoſition or immediate appointment of Providence; that GOD ſuffers nature to act by general laws; that things will mechanically purſue their natural courſe; and that all events derive their birth from the operation of ſecond cauſes. For what are the laws of nature but the appointment of the Author of nature; or what are ſecond cauſes but inſtruments in the hands of the Firſt? Nature can in no inſtance act independently on her Creator; nor can inferior cauſes produce any one effect without the co-operation of the Supreme, in whom they move and have their being. The ſame infinite, almighty Spirit, who formed the world, though to us inviſible, is intimately preſent to every part of it; and ſuperintends, governs, animates, and actuates the whole. His arm, covered with the veil of natural cauſes, directs all events. Matter in all its movements ever obeys His impulſe. Fire and hail, ſnow and vapours, and even wind and ſtorm, fulfil his word. All that we are apt to aſcribe to Nature, or to Fate and Neceſſity, or to Chance and Fortune, *i. e.* to phantoms, ſounds, and names,—all, all is divine direction: the whole plan is laid, and every part of it executed, by an unſeen power; and what we call Nature, Fate, or Chance, here on earth, has another appellation among the heavenly intelligences above, where the CREATOR and his works are better underſtood, and is there the Providence of the GOVERNOR of the univerſe, whoſe appointment is what we think Chance, whoſe will is Fate, and whoſe uniform manner of operation is Nature.

Though things in the material world act according to their reſpective natural powers, and there is an eſtabliſhed order and conſtitution of things, and the good or evil, the proſperous or calamitous events which happen in the world, are generally nothing elſe but the courſe of nature, or natural cauſes producing their natural effects; yet theſe are under the dominion of an inviſible Superintendant; who, by guiding and directing their influences, makes natural cauſes at all times, by the unerring ſkill and operation of his wiſdom and power, the inſtruments either of his tender mercy or exemplary juſtice,

tice, and the means of conferring a reward or inflicting a puniſhment, according to mens moral deportment, or as beſt ſuits the inſcrutable deſigns of his Providence.

That particular calamity which has lately waſted ſome nations, threatened to devour others, and which we are this day aſſembled to implore Heaven to avert from ourſelves, is in ſome inſtances in ſcripture repreſented as a judicial infliction. When the ground clave aſunder under Dathan and Abiram, and the earth opened her mouth and ſwallowed them up, and their houſes, and all the men that appertained unto them, and all their goods, it is recorded to have been the puniſhment of their crimes. When the Pſalmiſt informs us, that *the earth trembled and quaked*, that *the very foundations alſo of the hills ſhook and were removed*, the reaſon aſſigned is, *becauſe God was wroth. In his anger* (ſays Job) *he removeth the mountains, and overturneth them: he ſhaketh the earth out of her place, and the pillars thereof tremble.* But we are not hence authoriſed to conclude, that thoſe who ſeem to ſuffer by a particular appointment, or immediate act, of Providence, ſuffer for ſins which cry louder for vengeance than thoſe of the reſt of mankind.

Our Saviour has forbid ſuch uncharitable concluſions by informing us, that thoſe Galileans whom Pilate ordered to be ſlain, and whoſe blood he mingled with that of the ſacrifices which they were offering; and likewiſe that thoſe eighteen perſons upon whom the tower in Siloam fell: were not ſinners above all that dwelt in Jeruſalem. God may viſit a nation with his judgments, for reaſons far out of our ſight, far above our abilities to comprehend; for reaſons known only to his own infinite and incomprehenſible wiſdom. *His way is in the ſea, and his paths in the great waters, and his footſteps are not known.* And as well may we attempt to meaſure thoſe waters in the hollow of our hand, as to comprehend the counſels and deſigns of him, whoſe judgments are like the great deep.

In God's conference with Job, in order to aſſert and vindicate the juſtice of his Providence, he does not lay open the ſecret reaſons and deſigns of it; but only propoſes the following queſtions, expreſſed in the moſt beautiful language. *Where waſt thou when I laid the foundations*

foundations of the earth? declare if thou haſt underſtanding. Who hath laid the meaſure thereof? or who hath ſtretched the line upon it? Whereupon are the foundations thereof faſtened? or who hath laid the corner ſtone thereof? Who ſhut up the ſea with doors, when it brake forth as if it had iſſued from the womb? Haſt thou commanded the morning ſince thy days, and cauſed the day-ſpring to know his place? Where is the way where light dwelleth; and as for darkneſs, where is the place thereof? Haſt thou entered into the treaſures of the ſnow? or haſt thou known the treaſures of the hail? Out of whoſe womb came the ice? and the hoary froſt of heaven, who hath gendered it?

Theſe and other ſimilar queſtions were meant to convince Job how incapable he was of penetrating into the ſecret counſels of Providence, who was unable to comprehend the reaſons of the beſt known and moſt familiar works of Nature. *O the depth,* ſays St. Paul, *both of the wiſdom and knowledge of God! How unſearchable are his Judgments, and his ways paſt finding out! for who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been his counſellor?*

And yet, except we are informed of the mind of GOD, and admitted to his counſels, we can never fully comprehend the reaſons of his diſpenſations. The deſigns of his Providence extend from age to age; have all a mutual connection and unſeen dependence on each other; may not receive their intended completion till after a long ſucceſſion of ages; may, for ſecret reaſons, by myſterious means, be conducted to ſome unknown concluſion.

Impoſſible indeed it is for us to aſſign the reaſons of GOD's diſpenſations, except we are able to ſee what was acted upon the whole theatre of nature, from the firſt opening of it, from the commencement of time to its lateſt period. We are in this world ſpectators only as it were of a ſingle ſcene of Providence, which often appears perplexed and intricate, full of ſurprizing incidents and myſterious events. We muſt wait till the winding up of the whole, when its intricacies will be unravelled, and its myſterious paſſages explained; when it will appear worthy of the Divine Author; when we ſhall ſee, that the plan has been laid with in-

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finite underſtanding, is conducted with the higheſt wiſdom, and will be concluded with the moſt conſummate goodneſs.

In the mean time, when the divine judgments are abroad in the world; when GOD ſeems to have bowed the heavens and come down, and the earth trembles at his preſence; though we cannot aſſign a reaſon, why, amidſt the general depravity of mankind, he has ſelected a particular people to be the objects of his wrath, or why he has dealt thus ſeverely with them; yet we know one unerring interpretation of this diſpenſation of Providence; we know, that from the example of theſe terrors of the LORD, we ought to be perſuaded to learn righteouſneſs, to turn immediately unto GOD, to repent forthwith of our ſins, and forſake them, leſt we alſo periſh by the ſame or ſome other greater calamity. St. Jude informs us, that the deſtruction of the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah was meant to be, not only a puniſhment for their wickedneſs, but a laſting example and terror to future ages.

Every divine judgment has a voice, and conveys inſtruction. The late judgments ſpeak to us from heaven; and admoniſh us, if we have ears to hear, to fly without delay from our ſins, at Lot did from thoſe cities, when GOD rained fire from heaven upon them and overthrew them, leſt we be conſumed; to make haſte to eſcape from them, that our ſouls may live; never to look back, or return to paſt tranſgreſſions, leſt vengeance overtake us, and we become pillars or monuments of the ſeverity of divine juſtice.

And we ſhall find ſtill more reaſon to turn unto GOD by true repentance, and by the practice of every duty of humiliation, when we conſider, that beſides that dreadful calamity which has lately been the lot of ſome other nations, and we know not how ſoon may be our own, another judgment ſeems to be approaching, which though leſs dreadful in appearance, may be equally fatal in its effects, and may bring with it as ſure, though not ſo ſwift, deſtruction. Should Heaven think fit to employ war as the miniſter of his wrath, does not religion, does not reaſon, does not the impulſe of nature direct us to take ſanctuary in HIS throne, who is higher

higher than the higheſt, the KING of KINGS, in whoſe hands are the iſſues of war, and who can do whatſoever pleaſeth him both in the armies of heaven and in thoſe of earth? As certain as it is that there is a GOD and a Providence, ſo certain is it that human means alone cannot enſure ſucceſs; and that except the LORD keep our cities, the watchmen of the ſtate will wake in vain.

Let us not, then, exclude GOD from our counſels; let us not repoſe an abſolute confidence in human policy or power,—in the wealth of our people, the ſituation of our iſland, or the floating bulwarks that defend it. Doubtful always are the events of all human affairs; but thoſe of war are of all others the moſt fluctuating and uncertain, and often receive conſiderable revolutions from the ſlighteſt contingencies. The battle is not always to the ſtrong. No human eye can foreſee the various accidents which may defeat the beſt concerted meaſures, and blaſt the faireſt hopes of ſucceſs. Let us not, then, altogether lean on the broken reed of human ſtrength or wiſdom. Let us look up where religion inſtructs us for a ſupport equal to our wants,—to HIM who governs all nature, and directs all contingencies.

To every human, let us add every religious means of defence: Let us aid and re-inforce our armies by the integrity and rectitude of our manners; let us, by the ſincereſt vows of holy obedience, by every pious act of humiliation, every duty that a creature can pay to its Creator, endeavour to engage Heaven on our ſide, who will then plead our cauſe with them that ſtrive with us, whoſe mercy will then defend us with a ſhield, and whoſe ſalvation will be walls and bulwarks. The ſtorm of war ſeems to be riſing: and our nation, like the veſſels appointed for its protection, may be now carried up to heaven, and ſuddenly down again to the deep; may this hour be elated with ſucceſs, and the next ſink into adverſity. The ſkill and vigilance of thoſe at the helm may in vain contend with the violence of the tempeſt. Ought we not, then, like the diſciples on the lake when their ſhip was covered with the waves, to addreſs HIM whoſe providence never ſlumbers, and whom the winds and the ſea obey, with their devout ſupplicati-

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on, *Lord ſave us, or we periſh?* If any one among us can be inattentive to this duty, and inſenſible of his own and the common danger, may we not ſay to him as the mariners did to Jonah, *What meaneſt thou, O ſleeper! ariſe, and call upon thy God.*

In order to make our peace with God, and obtain his future bleſſings, one previous neceſſary ſtep is, to be grateful for thoſe we have received; for public as well as perſonal mercies, for the natural, political, and religious bleſſings we enjoy. In theſe reſpects, jointly conſidered, we are highly favoured, happy beyond the other nations of the earth; in our ſoil and climate, which are ſufficiently bountiful; in our commerce, which ſpreads its ſails in every ſea, and furniſhes the various productions which our own climate refuſes. Nature has poured the ocean round us, which at once conveys to us the wealth of foreign kingdoms, and guards the poſſeſſion of it.

Happy in our conſtitution of Government, in which, far from being the ſlaves of power, the ſovereign and the ſubject poſſeſs their reſpective rights, and, like the ocean which ſurrounds them, have their bounds preſcribed, which, though they may ſometimes rage and ſwell, they cannot paſs. Happy in the enjoyment of Liberty, the greateſt of public bleſſings; Liberty, which, refuſed admittance to many nations ſince the beginning of the world, and for many ages exiled from others where once ſhe inhabited, has at laſt fixed her chief reſidence in this envied iſland, where, protecting and protected, favoured by the monarch, and venerated by the people, ſhe diſpenſes her bleſſings to both! Happy in a religion, of whoſe peculiar excellence we may juſtly boaſt, clear and unpolluted, as the fountain from whence it flows; whoſe ſtreams, neither diſcoloured with the ſuperſtition of ſome countries, nor tinctured with the enthuſiaſm of others, run nowhere in greater purity than in our own.

Such are the public bleſſings with which Heaven has favoured and diſtinguiſhed us. One bleſſing indeed is ſtill wanting; and that is, a heart duly ſenſible of them; which is itſelf one of the greateſt bleſſings we can poſſeſs.

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Let us then be kind to ourſelves, and juſt to our Creator, in impreſſing our minds with a grateful ſenſe of theſe and all his mercies; ſo grateful a ſenſe and ſo deeply impreſſed, as may juſtify us in approaching him with our requeſts for a continuance of them.

To our gratitude for his mercies, let us add our humbleſt ſupplications to him to avert the inflictions with which he now threatens us; not to ſuffer the deep to ſwallow us up; nor the pit to ſhut her mouth upon us; not to deliver us up to the will of our enemies, nor to let our foes triumph over us. Let us add an holy ſorrow for our offences which may have deſerved thoſe inflictions; and let us turn unto the LORD our GOD, with weeping, with faſting, and with mourning. To every outward expreſſion of humiliation, let us add the ſincereſt piety of ſoul; let us rent our hearts, and not our garments; let us ſupplicate his bleſſings, not only with our lips, but in our lives. When the united addreſſes of a whole nation are offered to Heaven, and the hearts of a whole people are lifted up to GOD in prayer, it is pious and reaſonable to hope, that he will hear them from the habitation of his holineſs; that he will ſtay his hand, though armed for deſtruction; and will ſuffer an aſſembly of holy ſupplicants ſurrounding his throne, to diſarm him, as it were, of his vengeance, and turn away his wrathful indignation; and that he will extend the ſame mercy to us as to other nations, whoſe deſtruction, the ſcripture informs us, he had threatened; and yet, upon their repentance, repented of the evils denounced againſt them, and did them not. *O that we were wiſe, that we would conſider this! O that there were ſuch an heart in us! that we would turn unto God and fear him, and keep his commandments always, that it might be well with us!*

But if the cry of the national ſins ſhould reach heaven, and with a voice louder than our prayers call for vengeance; or if for reaſons known only to his own unſearchable wiſdom, GOD ſhould appoint theſe nations to become examples of his avenging juſtice, and to ſuffer the inflictions he threatens; yet if, attentive to the monitions of his judgments, we turn from our evil ways, and repent, and learn righteouſneſs, our own perſonal piety will always recommend us to his protection, and

enſure his favour. Then, whatever judgment he may ſee fit to inflict; though war riſe up againſt us, and the ſword go through the land; or though the earth be moved, and the hills be carried into the midſt of the ſea;—ſtill we may hold faſt our confidence in God; ſtill we may be aſſured that he will not withdraw his mercy from us.

Or, if the judgments that are now in the earth ſhould even be appointed to be preparatory to the final, general judgment; if we could ſuppoſe, that the late convulſions of the earth were meant to unhinge its frame, and to precede its immediate diſſolution; if we ſhould live even to ſee that laſt tremendous day and hour, of which knoweth no man; when an univerſal earthquake ſhall ſhake the foundations of the world, and involve all its kingdoms and the glory of them, all the works of art and nature, cities and provinces, in one promiſcuous ruin; when ſinners ſhall conſider as the mildeſt of mercies, what now appears the moſt dreadful of viſitations; when they ſhall in vain implore the calamity which they this day deprecate, in vain call upon the mountains to fall on them, and the hills to cover them: even then, ſupported by a conſciouſneſs of duty and an holy confidence in God, we may hope, that the hand of Providence will conduct us from this ſeat of diſcord, theſe regions of judgment, to where peace and mercy dwell; where no evil can ever approach, where no judgment ever viſits, where the voice of diſcord is never heard, where will be no calamities to demand our prayers, nothing but mercies to rejoice us; where everlaſting praiſe will be our employment, and everlaſting peace our reward.

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SERMON XVII.

Our SAVIOUR'S EXAMPLE recommended to our imitation.

1 PET. ii. 21.

Chriſt alſo ſuffered for us, leaving us an example, that we ſhould follow his ſteps.

OUR bleſſed LORD, whoſe example is here recommended to our imitation, came into the world, to live, as well as to die, for us; and not only by the effuſion of his ſacred blood to offer an expiatory ſacrifice for the ſins of mankind, but alſo to go before us as our guide and conductor in the paths of virtue, and to exhibit in his own manners a complete pattern of unerring rectitude of life. And it is a glory peculiar to the Chriſtian inſtitution, that the Author of it was himſelf the great example of thoſe duties which he required from his followers. In his whole deportment, he exemplified his doctrine; and not only taught, but fulfilled, all righteouſneſs. Herein he claims an unrivalled ſuperiority above all other the moſt eminent prophets, philoſophers, or law-givers; the ſanctity of whoſe lives never equalled the purity of their precepts. They were indeed, many of them, exemplary in their manners, but not faultleſs; inſtructive, but not unerring, guides. His is the only faultleſs, finiſhed character, that ever appeared in human form,—a complete and perfect model of univerſal goodneſs. He had all the moral virtues of our nature, without any of its ſinful frailties. In him we obſerve no ſpot or blemiſh, no infirmity or defect to ſhade and obſcure his other excellencies. In this SUN of Righteouſneſs the virtues all centre, and ſhine with ſuch ſuperior luſtre, that all other characters, like leſſer lights, loſe their brightneſs, and diſappear before it.

In this diſcourſe I ſhall conſider the excellence of our bleſſed Saviour's religious deportment, with regard to the principal duties we owe to GOD, to ourſelves, and to mankind.

I. I ſhall begin with obſerving the example of his piety; both becauſe it is the firſt and great commandment, the ſupreme obligation incumbent on all moral beings; and becauſe it appeared with ſuperior diſtinction in his whole life, and ſeemed to be the ruling principle of his conduct. For he not only often retired from the notice of the world, that he might indulge religious contemplation, and offer up his ſupplications to HIM who ſeeth in ſecret, ſometimes continuing whole nights in prayer; but was equally obſervant of public, as of private, devotion. Even before he aſſumed his miniſterial character, though the ſacred hiſtorians are ſilent as to other particulars of his conduct, yet they inform us, that it was his cuſtom to attend the ſervice of the ſynagogue on the ſabbath-day.

From this example we may learn, not only the propriety of private ſupplications to the Throne of Grace, but the obligation alſo of frequently aſſembling and aſſiſting at the public ſolemnities of worſhip. If it became the great Founder of our religion to put up both private and public addreſſes to Heaven, it is doubtleſs a duty incumbent alſo on us, as our dependence on the Author of our being is not leſs, and our wants and infirmities are infinitely greater. And however ſome may conſider Piety as an unneceſſary ingredient in their character, provided they are juſt, and honeſt, and friendly in their diſpoſitions and actions; yet certainly no truth can be more evident than the obligation of the duties of piety, both from our Saviour's example, and from the reaſon of the thing. For what are the duties of Piety, but expreſſions of reverence and gratitude to the Supreme Being? And ſurely his perfections juſtly demand the one, and his bleſſings daily conferred on us give him an unqueſtionable right to the other. Whatever other virtues may enter into the brighteſt character, yet without Piety it will be defective in the moſt eſſential duty of a reaſonable and dependant being.

But further: Moſt conſpicuous alſo was our bleſſed LORD's Reſignation to the Divine Will. He ſubmitted to all the humiliations of mortality. His life was a ſcene of invincible patience under indignities and afflictions: *Never was any ſorrow like unto his ſorrow, wherewith the Lord*

Lord afflicted him in the day of his fierce anger. Though he had all the tender paſſions of human nature, and doubtleſs the quickeſt ſenſibility of pain and anguiſh; yet he endured them with more than human patience. In the laſt and moſt diſtreſsful ſcene of his life, though he expreſſed in his prayer the ſtrongeſt averſion to the torture and ignominy of crucifixion, yet ſtill it was accompanied with due ſubmiſſion to the will of his heavenly Father: *Father, not my will, but thine be done.* He patiently ſubmitted to the ſevereſt inflictions, and drank the bitter cup with a fortitude ſuperior to his ſufferings.

Let us hence tranſcribe into our practice a pious reſignation to God, and an humble acquieſcence under his moſt afflictive diſpenſations. If our bleſſed Lord, who knew no guilt, willingly endured the puniſhment of it; if he ſubmitted to ſuffer for our ſins, not for his own; all impatience and diſcontent muſt ill become us, when our light afflictions fall ſhort of the weight and ſeverity of his ſufferings; when we are conſcious that we receive only the reward of our evil deeds, and that the inflictions of divine juſtice are much gentler than our iniquities deſerve.

Our Saviour alſo, in his whole conduct, expreſſed an eminent Zeal for the Honour of God. This appeared not only in his punctual attendance on the ſolemnities of public worſhip, which have an immediate and direct tendency to advance the divine honour,—but alſo particularly in his expelling the buyers and ſellers out of the temple; in the indignation he expreſſed againſt thoſe whoſe impiety preſumed to profane a place ſacred to the duties of religion.

II. If we obſerve our Saviour's life with regard to thoſe duties which we owe to ourſelves, we ſhall find them all united in him; and that, if ever virtue appeared in a corporeal form, if ever it was incarnate and viſible to human eyes, it was when the Son of God took upon him our nature. He obſerved a due medium between the extremes of luxuries and auſterities; thereby teaching the world that duty demands not a total abſtinence from the ſatisfaction of life, as was then the opinion of the Phariſees, but a prudent and temperate

uſe of them. He honoured even feaſts more than once with his preſence, and added to the proviſions of one of them by a miracle. In his whole deportment, religion appeared, not with a gloomy aſpect, or a ſevere and forbidding mien; but with a graceful form, and ſober majeſty, and in all the beauty of holineſs. We meet with much higher appearances of exterior ſanctity, and more ſevere auſterities, in the life of John the Baptiſt; which, as he was not veſted with the power of miracles, might be neceſſary in order to attract obſervation, and engage the public attention to his doctrine: But as our bleſſed LORD's divine commiſſion was abundantly proved by miraculous atteſtations, and as his life was to be an univerſal model and rule of duty to ſucceeding ages, he gave a more eaſy, natural and generally uſeful example, adapted to the imitation of all ranks and orders of men.

Humility is another virtue which diſtinguiſhes itſelf in every part of our Saviour's life and character. What an amazing ſcene of humility opens to us on our firſt reflections on him, as deſcending from that inconceivable glory which he poſſeſſed before his incarnation, to a nature ſo much inferior to his own, and to all the abaſements and infirmities of that nature, ſin only excepted! He came not in the form of a temporal prince, furrounded with the pageantry of human grandeur, as the Jews expected: he came, *not to be miniſtered unto, but to miniſter*. If we attend him in his converſations, we find him preaching the goſpel to the poor; and even among his followers appearing as a ſervant rather than a maſter. We find him executing the loweſt office of a ſervant, in waſhing his diſciples feet; and the inſtruction he inculcates on this occaſion is, that if HE their Lord and Maſter had made ſuch condeſcenſions to them, much more ought they to be aſſiſting in the like offices of humiliation one to another. There is perhaps, no virtue of his, which we have ſo much reaſon, and ſo little inclination, to imitate. But if to him ſuch acts of humility appeared not unbecoming the majeſty of HIS nature, ſurely the greateſt among the ſons of men ought to think it no diminution of their dignity to be of an humble and contrite ſpirit; no diſhonour to the brighteſt accompliſhments,

pliſhments, or the moſt elevated ſtations, to practiſe the humilities of true benevolence.

And as our bleſſed LORD ſubmitted to ſuch condeſcenſions, to teach thoſe of the higheſt rank to be humble and aſſiſting to their inferiors; ſo alſo, to give to the lower claſſes a leſſon of complacency and contentment, he choſe a conditon deſtitute of the common proviſions of life, and expoſed to the hunger and thirſt, the pains and diſtreſſes, which he relieved in others *The ſon of man had not where to lay his head*; nor was he able to pay the common tribute without a miracle. In this, as in all other inſtances, his manners correſponded with his doctrine; which inſtructs us, not to ſet our affections on the world, not to lay up for ourſelves treaſures in earth, but in heaven.

We may alſo from hence be aſſured, that poverty is no indication of the divine diſpleaſure; that if the Providence of GOD ſhould think fit to reduce us to the loweſt circumſtances of indigence, and the moſt humiliating ſituation, we ought not thence to infer that he has forgotten to be gracious to us, or that his regard is at all diminiſhed, ——ſeeing he was pleaſed to place in theſe circumſtances of poverty and affliction, even his Son, in whom he was well pleaſed.

III. Laſtly, The life of our Saviour was moſt exemplary in the duties which we owe one to another. His piety, which was the leading principle of his conduct, was rational, not rapturous; inſtructive, not oſtentatious; did not expreſs itſelf in peculiar auſterities or affected ſingularities, in abſtruſe myſteries and intricate ſpeculations, which might deter a timorous, or diſcourage a weak diſciple;—but in the plain and uſeful duties of a good life. All he did, or taught or ſuffered, was one continued act of benevolence. It was his meat and drink, his care and delight, his life and happineſs, to go about doing good; to ſeek occaſions of conferring his bleſſings; to lay hold on every opportunity of promoting both the temporal and eternal intereſts of mankind. It was his manner, from common occurrences, to take occaſion of introducing ſome doctrine ſalutary to the ſoul, and tending to its ſpiritual nutriment, and at the ſame time he went about healing all manner of ſickneſs and diſeaſes

diſeaſes among the people. Mercy, with a heavenly voice, ſpoke in all he uttered: Charity poured forth her ſtores in all he did.

Even the miracles he performed, were as expreſſive of his goodneſs as of his power; and were wrought for the benefit, not the amazement, of thoſe that ſaw them. They gave eyes to the blind, feet to the lame, bread to the indigent, health to the ſick, and even life to the dead. Equally proofs of his humane diſpoſition and his divine authority, they were worthy of the SON of GOD, and the Brother of Mankind. We are not indeed capable of expreſſing our benevolence in the ſame miraculous manner as our bleſſed LORD; yet his example may teach us, that we ought, as we have opportunity, to adminiſter relief to the needy, aſſiſtance to the injured, protection to the oppreſſed, inſtruction to the ignorant, encouragement to the weak, and conſolation to the afflicted. It may teach us to be merciful, not only as our Father which is in heaven, but as his Son upon earth, was merciful; and to endeavour, to the utmoſt of our power, to become ſaviours one to another.

Again, the benignant and forgiving diſpoſition of our LORD was not leſs exemplary than his other virtues. In him the ornament of a meek and quiet ſpirit was moſt conſpicuous. Compaſſion, forgiveneſs and beneficence, were the returns he made to provocations, indignities, and injuries. Himſelf was unmoved at that behaviour of the Samaritans, which provoked his diſciples to ſolicit him to call down fire from heaven to conſume them. His calm, diſpaſſionate anſwer to the officer who ſmote him, was, *If I have done evil, bear witneſs of the evil; but if well, why ſmiteſt thou me?* When he was reviled, he reviled not again; when he ſuffered, he threatened not. When expoſed with mock pageantry to the deriſion of the people, and through a long courſe of preparatory inſults and indignities, led on to his crucifixion, he diſcovered no marks of impatience, no thirſt of revenge, no tincture of ungoverned and unforgiving reſentment. He ſtill poſſeſſed the ſame mildneſs of diſpoſition, the ſame equal compoſure of ſpirit, the ſame unconquerable benevolence. No provocations could irritate him to a deſire of returning evil for evil,

nor

nor the moſt undeſerved indignities prevail with him to depart from his rule of triumphing over the injuſtice and inſolence of his oppreſſors by acts of kindneſs and commiſeration. With a meekneſs as invincible as their malice, he was as ready to forgive injuries and inſults, as they were to offer them. Even upon the croſs, amidſt the agonies of death and the reproaches of his perſecutors, he employed his lateſt breath to ſerve the authors of his ſufferings: he poured out his prayers as well as his blood, for thoſe that ſhed it; and urged in their favour the only extenuation their crime could admit, *Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.*

Frequent and ſerious contemplation of his example would be a powerful mean to ſuppreſs in us all malice, hatred, and revenge; and, whilſt we were not inſenſible of the injuries we received, would inſtruct us not to forget tenderneſs and humanity to the authors of them.

The limits of this diſcourſe will not permit me to enumerate the virtues, nor do juſtice to the character, of the bleſſed Jesus. His was a perfect and complete example of univerſal righteouſneſs: an example ſo perfect, as to have in it no mixture of human infirmity; and ſo complete, as to direct our conduct in every duty. In him we ſee every virtue delineated: we ſee a faultleſs, finiſhed portrait of holineſs, a viſible repreſentation of the inviſible perfections of the Deity. Let us then ſet this example often before us; let the lively image of his piety be often preſent to our thoughts: that we may imitate his virtues; that we may form our manners by that perfect model; and with pious induſtry ſtrive to approach nearer to his nature, who for this purpoſe mercifully condeſcended to aſſume ours.

Let us often recollect and review the ſacred hiſtory of his life; let us meditate on the various paſſages of it, record them in our breaſts, write them upon the table of our hearts; that our ſouls may take the impreſſion of his holineſs, and the ſame mind may be in us which was in Christ Jesus. And though it is not impoſſible to arrive at his immaculate perfection, or to purify ourſelves as he was pure; yet we may be always

ways approaching nearer to his unſpotted purity and perfection, may be always improving our own virtues by copying his; and though we cannot equal him, we may excel ourſelves. Though he no longer in his human nature dwells and converſes upon earth; yet, in his example, he ſtill teaches and exhorts to righteouſneſs. In the ſcriptures he ſtill appears: though not perſonally, as to the Jews; yet he there ſtill exhibits his miracles, repeats his divine precepts, inculcates the pureſt virtues, inſtructs us by his heavenly wiſdom, ſpeaks as never man ſpake, and manifeſts himſelf to our Reaſon as plainly as he did to their Senſes.

Bleſſed, doubtleſs, were they whoſe ſenſes were conſcious of his preſence; bleſſed the eyes that ſaw, and the ears that heard him: but yet more bleſſed are we who have not ſeen, if we believe and obey his doctrine; more bleſſed we, if we hear the word of GOD, and keep it.

I ſhall conclude this diſcourſe with a collect of our church.——"O LORD, who has given thine only Son "to be unto us both a ſacrifice for ſin, and alſo an "enſample of godly life, give us grace, that we may "always moſt thankfully receive that his inеſtima-"ble benefit, and alſo daily endeavour to follow "the bleſſed ſteps of his moſt holy life, through the "ſame Jeſus Chriſt our LORD. To whom, with the "Father, and holy Spirit," &c.

SERMON XVIII.

Requiſites of PRAYER.

JAM. iv. 3.

Ye aſk, and receive not, becauſe ye aſk amiſs.

THERE is hardly any principle of religion more generally admitted, than that the CREATOR of the world ought to be worſhipped by his intelligent creatures. It is the clear dictate of nature, that we ſhould addreſs

addreſs Him, the SOVEREIGN of the univerſe, for the ſupply of our neceſſities and wants; that we ſhould offer to him the ſacrifice of a devout heart, and the humbleſt acknowledgements of our dependence on him. The univerſal practice of all nations, and that impulſe which all men feel to apply to him in ſeaſons of diſtreſs, clearly point out the ſenſe of nature in this particular. Prayer is the neareſt approach that, in our preſent ſtate, we can make to the Deity. To neglect or ſhun this duty, is to ſhun all approaches to GOD; it is to withdraw, as far as may be, from his preſence and protection; it is to diſclaim all intercourſe with him, to diſown our dependence, to diſavow our obligations, and give up the expectations of his favour.

Prayer, then, being both a reaſonable and important duty, we ought to inquire, How we may perform it in a right manner; how we may render ourſelves and our prayers acceptable to the object of our worſhip; for though we aſk, we ſhall not receive, if we aſk amiſs. Let us conſider, therefore, with what qualifications or diſpoſitions of mind we ſhould approach our Maker, when we offer our addreſſes to him.

I. Attention and fervency are principally requiſite to render our prayers acceptable to GOD, and beneficial to ourſelves. If we draw near to him with our lips only, whilſt our heart is far from him; if we attend the duties of his worſhip with a languid, abſent, and inattentive mind, in compliance only with form and cuſtom, without due impreſſions of the ſacredneſs of the ſervice in which we are engaged; can we expect that ſuch ſuperficial unmeaning homage can recommend us to his favour, or that he will accept the bare reſemblance or mock repreſentation of prayer?

It is not the ſervice of the lips, it is the homage of the mind, which GOD regards. He ſees and approves even the ſilent devotions of the heart, which need not be formed into vocal prayers to inform him of our neceſſities, but only to aid our own weakneſs, and to keep the mind more ſteady and attentive to the duty we are paying to our CREATOR. When we approach the throne of grace, and addreſs the SOVEREIGN LORD of heaven and earth; then ſurely, if ever, there is the higheſt

higheſt occaſion to bring with us a ſerious and collected frame of mind, to awaken all our attention to call upon all that is within us, and to ſummon and aſſemble all the powers and faculties of the ſoul.

Such indeed, it muſt be owned, is the weakneſs and imbecility of our nature, that the moſt vigilant piety cannot long keep its attention ſo much awake, and ſo ſteadily fixed on the duties of worſhip, as to prevent all caſual involuntary wandering. Ideas often paſs through the mind in quick ſucceſſion: nor is it eaſy always to detain and fix what are in their nature ſo fugitive and volatile. But if we know ourſelves ſubject to this weakneſs, it concerns us the more to guard againſt it: and though it may not be always in our power to prevent foreign ideas from offering themſelves to the mind, and mingling with our devotions; yet we need not invite or entertain them, but may diſmiſs them as ſoon as they intrude. We ought not, therefore, always to charge that upon the infirmity of our nature, which is often the effect of voluntary inadvertence. GOD, who made and faſhioned us, and expects a ſervice proportioned only to the powers he has given us, will no doubt pardon all involuntary defects that may accompany our addreſſes to him; but we ought to remember, that the importance of the duty claims every regard, all the attention we are able to give it.

And if we give due attention to our prayers, they will be accompanied with ſuitable affections. We ſhall pray with fervency in ſuch degree as our natural temperament or frame of mind will admit; for all are not capable of the ſame fervour: nor is it required of us to feel warm tranſports or emotions when we addreſs ourſelves to GOD; for theſe depend on natural ſenſibility and complexion, or riſe out of particular circumſtances and occaſions. For which reaſon, it has been the wiſdom of the compilers of our liturgy, to reject all rapturous expreſſions, and to ſuit its devotional language to a grave and ſedate, not to an impetuous, enthuſiaſtick, ſpirit of piety.

II. Perſeverance is another condition upon which depends the ſucceſs of our prayers. In the parable of the unjuſt

unjuſt judge, we are informed, that he who neither feared God nor regarded man, who was inſenſible to all conſiderations of religion or humanity, was yet prevailed on to grant relief to a neceſſitous ſupplicant, merely by the continued importunity of her petitions. And our Saviour has inſtructed us to conclude, that perſeverance in prayer to Heaven will have the ſame effect; for he ſpoke the parable to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint.

True it is, the reaſons for the prevalence of importunity with men, have no place when applied to God. Men may not attend to our firſt applications, may not be able or inclined to aſſiſt us; may pride themſelves in the dependence of their ſupplicants, and in the oſtentation of power; and the favours they mean to refuſe, importunity and perſeverance may extort. But God always knows our neceſſities even before we aſk; is infinitely able to grant all that we deſire; can receive no acceſſion of glory from the dependence of his creatures; is incapable of being ſoftened by the repetition, or wearied by the importunity, of addreſſes.

For what reaſons, then, it may be aſked, is it neceſſary to perſevere in our ſupplications to Heaven? Why ſhould a Being infinitely wiſe and good, who needs not to deliberate how far it is reaſonable to favour our petitions; why ſhould he grant to our repeated, what he refuſes to our firſt, requeſts?

The reaſons of the divine adminiſtration are often far above out of our ſight; his ways are not as our ways, nor his thoughts as our thoughts; and we might therefore, and ought to acquieſce in our Saviour's declaration concerning the methods of his providence and moral government, though we are quite incapable of accounting for them. But, in the preſent caſe, it is eaſy to aſſign, if not the true, yet juſt grounds for ſuch a conduct. For though perſeverance in prayer can have no efficacy in inclining God to be more merciful, it may yet be effectual in diſpoſing us to become proper objects of mercy. Though it can create no change in the divine nature, which is immutable, the ſame yeſterday, to-day, and for ever; yet it may form in us a new heart and a new

ſpirit,

ſpirit, and render us more worthy of his favours, which, on that conſideration, may be granted.

Beſides, he underſtands our neceſſities much better than we ourſelves; he knows the propereſt ſeaſon for conferring his bleſſings, and when we are beſt fitted to profit by them. He is the univerſal Parent of his creatures, and ſuits the methods of his providence to our trueſt advantage. Where an immediate compliance with our requeſts is moſt conducive to our final happineſs, he is as ready to give as we to aſk. Where to refuſe our petitions will contribute more to this great end, whilſt he appears to deny a bleſſing, he grants one in the refuſal; and where ſuſpending his bleſſings for a time will be moſt beneficial, there they are put off to a more convenient ſeaſon.

Though GOD, therefore, may, for wiſe reaſons, delay to anſwer our firſt petitions; yet ought we not to deſpair of the acceptance of our repeated prayers. We ought to pray without ceaſing: *i. e.* not, with a weak ſuperſtition or enthuſiaſtic pride, to devote our whole time to prayers; but, by frequent periodical performances of this duty, to recommend ourſelves and our concernments to the care of Heaven.

III. Humility, and ſubmiſſion to the divine will, are neceſſary conditions of our prayers. When we come into the preſence of the SOVEREIGN of the Univerſe, we ought to conſider the infinite ſuperiority of his nature to ours, and impreſs our hearts with the moſt awful veneration of him, and offer our ſupplications with the moſt humble reverence, ſuited to his greatneſs and majeſty, and our own meanneſs and unworthineſs to approach him.

And as we ought with the moſt reverential awe to come before the LORD, and bow ourſelves before the moſt high GOD, and with the deepeſt humility of heart to ſue for mercies we have no right to, and for bleſſings we deſerve not; ſo likewiſe ought we to reſign all our requeſts, inclinations, and deſires, to the determination of his all-wiſe providence. We are improper judges of our own condition, and know not what to pray for as we ought. If we aſk, what, in the opinion of the world, are reputed bleſſings; wealth, honour, diſtinction, ſucceſs,

ceſs, and the like; theſe may, in their immediate or remote conſequences, be attended with a train of unknown evils. Though in themſelves good, we may be diſpoſed to make an improper uſe of them, and to us they may become evil; or though they favour our preſent, they may be fatal to our future intereſts.

We ought to ſubmit all our requeſts, therefore, to the wiſdom of HIM who has all futurity before him, and beſt knows how to govern his world, and when and where to confer his bleſſings. Of this ſubmiſſion our SAVIOUR has left us a ſtriking example: *O my Father, if it be poſſible, let this cup paſs from me: nevertheleſs, not as I will, but as thou wilt.* In conformity to which example, we ought to ſubmit our wills to the will of Heaven; and to all our prayers, intentionally at leaſt, if not expreſsly, to add, *Nevertheleſs, not as I will, but as thou wilt;* or, as our church has directed us to addreſs GOD, that he would fulfil the deſires and petitions of his ſervants as may be moſt expedient for them.

IV. Our prayers to GOD ought to be accompanied with a truſt and confidence in his goodneſs; a confidence that compoſes our fears, and ſets us above all deſpondency. When, indeed, we reflect upon the infinite holineſs and Majeſty of GOD, and our own impurity and meanneſs; when we conſider the immenſe diſtance between his nature and ours, rendered ſtill more immenſe, if that were poſſible, by our unworthineſs, it might ſeem preſumption enough to preſent ourſelves and our addreſſes before the throne of GOD, without adding a confidence that thoſe addreſſes will be regarded by him. But as thoſe addreſſes are made in obedience to his commands, and our hopes encouraged by his ſure promiſes, we may and ought to approach him with a confidence that we ſhall either be indulged in the particular ſubject of our requeſts, or that he will do in that and every other caſe that we recommend to his providence, whatever to his wiſdom appears beſt and fitteſt for us.

V. The laſt requiſite I ſhall mention, neceſſary to recommend our prayers to the divine acceptance is integrity of heart; without which we have reaſon to apprehend,

hend, that GOD will be as regardleſs to our ſupplications, as we have been of his commandments. This we know, that GOD heareth not ſinners; but if any man be a worſhipper of GOD, and do his will, him he heareth: *If I incline unto wickedneſs with my heart*, ſays the Pſalmiſt, *the Lord will not hear me*. A religious diſpoſition of mind, is the only foundation of confidence when we addreſs our prayers to GOD. The obedience of a religious life is to him the moſt acceptable worſhip; and where integrity and virtue are wanting, no homage, no ſacrifice, no ſervices, can obtain his acceptance. If we pray for pardon of our ſins, we muſt reſolve to forſake them; if we implore his bleſſings, it muſt be our care to deſerve them. We muſt come before him, therefore, not with all our ſins and pollutions about us; but with an upright, uncorrupted heart, filled with the pureſt affections, with all the virtues, with every moral grace that can adorn our nature, and recommend it to his countenance.

From what has been obſerved, it may appear, that attention, fervency, perſeverance, humility, ſubmiſſion to the will of GOD, confidence in his goodneſs, and integrity of heart, are the conditions requiſite to render our prayers acceptable to him.

Let us then, as often as we return to this houſe of prayer, bring with us a mind ſerious, devout and diſengaged; neither ruffled with cares, nor diſſipated by pleaſure; that we may ſerve GOD with an undivided attention and with a heart devoted ſolely to the right diſcharge of the duty which we profeſs to perform. Let no inadvertent behaviour betray our abſence from GOD, and the indiſpoſition of our heart to pay him that homage which with our lips we acknowledge to be due to him. Let not the ſuſpenſion of his bleſſings diſcourage our perſeverance: for though he favours not our firſt, he may our repeated, petitions. Let them be accompanied with humility of heart; with an abſolute, unreſerved, ſubmiſſion to the ſovereign will of HIM whoſe goodneſs to us is expreſſed ſometimes by gratifying, ſometimes by diſappointing, our hopes; and with a firm dependence on his providence, and a truſt that he will order all things for our good. And

let

let them be offered up with a mind pure and uncorrupted.

To the Firſt, the Greateſt and the Beſt of Beings, be it our care to pay our daily homage. We are every day dependant on God; and every day ſhould begin, and cloſe, with pious acknowledgments of our dependence. Every morning, we ſhould look up to him for a renewal of his mercies; and, every evening, aſk forgiveneſs for the errors of the preceding day. When we riſe, we ſhould implore his guidance; and when we lie down, we ſhould ſupplicate his protection. Often ſhould we lift up our ſouls in occaſional ſupplications to the great Preſerver of our being, and recommend ourſelves and our concernments to his providence.

Neither private nor public devotion ſhould be omitted; for each has its diſtinct and peculiar advantages. Private devotion is better fitted to aſk particular bleſſings, or to requeſt the forgiveneſs of private tranſgreſſions. In the cloſet-retirement, where the ſupplicant withdraws from the world to hold converſe with his God, and is under no eye but that of Heaven, he may pour out the ſighings of a contrite heart; may unburden his diſconſolate boſom; may diſcloſe thoſe ſecret griefs and neceſſities which are not to be revealed to the eye of the world. There he may indulge all the fervour of piety, without ſuſpicion of hypocriſy or oſtentation; there alſo he is better able to fix his attention, which public objects, by offering themſelves to our notice, are but too apt to interrupt and divert.

On the other hand, public addreſſes to God are better adapted to acknowledge public mercies, to bring down common bleſſings, and to avert public judgments. Here alſo the ſolemnity of the houſe of God reminds us of the reverence due to his awful preſence; and the piety of our fellow-ſupplicants may excite and animate our devotions, and invite us to an holy emulation. We cannot doubt the acceptance of both our public and retired devotions. When we are here gathered together, we have our Saviour's promiſe, that he will be in the midſt of us; and we have the ſame aſſurance, that if we pray to our Fa-

THER in ſecret, our FATHER which is in ſecret ſhall reward us openly.

Let us not then neglect to pay this homage, ſo reſpectful to GOD, and ſo beneficial to ourſelves. Let us not neglect to aſk the mercies he delights to grant. Should we never obtain the bleſſings we aſk, yet the conſciouſneſs of having done our duty in aſking will always adminiſter ſatisfaction. But to this duty we are encouraged by the ſtrongeſt aſſurances from the GOD of truth, that our prayers ſhall not aſcend to heaven in vain; and that, if we reap not the immediate fruit of them, yet bleſſings will be laid up in ſtore, and reſerved for us againſt the great day of retribution.

SERMON XIX.

On DEATH.

HEB. IX. 27.

It is appointed unto men once to die.

THESE words lead to ſome conſiderations on that event which is appointed to all men: An event which need not to alarm, to intimidate, or afflict us; ſince our religion aſſures us, that *though we die, yet ſhall we live;* that though death cloſes the preſent ſcene of mortality, yet it draws aſide the veil that now intercepts our proſpect of futurity, and opens to us an entrance into another world, a world of endleſs and inconceivable bliſs.

Death, indeed, is an object ſo much dreaded, ſo alarming to human nature; it is ſo ghaſtly a form, and comes to us arrayed in ſuch various terrors; that Religion indeed may, but no Philoſophy can ever enable us to conquer our fears, and meet the awful ſpectre with firmneſs and compoſure. It is religion only that can impart that fortitude. To him who has not been induced

duced by religion to extend his views beyond this life, bitter muſt be the remembrance, formidable the image of death, as it breaks off his connection with viſible nature, ſeparates him from all that has hitherto engaged or delighted him, and puts an everlaſting period to every idea of enjoyment.

The infidel, who acknowledges nothing in the human compoſition ſuperior to matter and mechaniſm, who accounts the ſoul to be only the moſt ſubtile part of the brain, and expects that his whole being will ſoon diſſolve and moulder into duſt, not only debaſes the honour of his nature, but without one ray of pleaſing hope to illuminate his mind, muſt become diſconſolate, and gloomy as the proſpect which lies before him. Religion, on the contrary, by acquainting us with the dignity of the ſoul, and the certainty of our future exiſtence, brightens up our proſpect; adminiſters the higheſt conſolation; alleviates our ſufferings, and adds to our pleaſures, by the anticipations of a ſuperior happineſs; and bids us wait for death with calmneſs and reſignation, as an event that will introduce us to all the felicity allotted to our being.

From the words of the text, I ſhall take occaſion to ſhow, 1*ſt*, Under what practical notions we ſhould conſider death; and, 2*dly*, Shall obſerve the religious advantages which may reſult from contemplating our diſſolution.

I. We ſhould conſider death as an event certain and inevitable, in conſequence of that irreverſible ſentence once pronounced to our firſt parents, and, in them, to all ſucceeding generations, That duſt we are, and unto duſt we muſt return;—in order that we may have a juſt ſenſe of the tranſitory nature of all earthly objects and enjoyments, and, from ſerious impreſſions of the certainty of our departure out of this life, may be induced to provide for another, and to begin heaven here in the rectitude of our minds and the purity of our manners.

To this purpoſe, pious perſons have put up their prayers to God, that he would let them know their end and the number of their days, that they might know how frail they were: not that they were ſtrangers to the

frailty of their nature, when thouſands fell beſide them; but their prayer was meant to implore Heaven to impreſs them with ſo devout a ſenſe of their appointed time, as might influence their manners, might form their minds to due ſerioufneſs, and elevate their affections from earth to heaven.

It is not indeed required of us to be always meditating upon death; for that is impracticable. Such is our frame, and the conſtitution of the world, that there muſt be a time for other thoughts; and a perpetual meditation on the laſt hour, however it may ſuit the ſolitude of a monaſtic, is incompatible with the duties of common life. But yet the idea of our mortality ſhould predominate in our minds, as an habitual ſettled principle; often, though not ever, preſent; operating always, though not always perceived. Leſt, indeed, by attending to the preſent, we ſhould become unmindful of the future; and, by being careful about things of the world, ſhould neglect to provide for our departure out of it; the providence of God ſees fit to remind and admoniſh us of it, by exhibiting daily inſtances of the power and dominion of death, and ſometimes ſhewing, that the higheſt birth and diſtinction muſt yield to that king of terrors, that univerſal conqueror, who putteth all things under his feet.

Every example of mortality ſhould renew the impreſſions of our own. Whenever, eſpecially, we attend the obſequies of the dead, and pay the laſt honours to a departed friend, it might be uſeful to accuſtom ourſelves to conſider, that the ſame fate muſt one day be our own; that ſoon we muſt, we know not how ſoon, be added to the number of thoſe whoſe probation is paſt, and whoſe lot is decided; and that though we cannot aſcertain the period of that event, we may inſure the conſequence, by an uniform life of holineſs and virtue, the beſt, the only, preparation for death.

The gay Atheiſt (if ſuch there be) may drown reflection in intemperance; and with diſſolute levity ſay, *Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die.* But the wiſer and more conſiderate Chriſtian will commune with his heart, and thus reſolve: "Let me not remove my integrity from me, my righteouſneſs let me hold faſt;

let

let me not offend in thought or deed; let every action be juſt, every intention pure, that nothing may ſtain my integrity or pollute my conſcience: for I know, that *it is appointed unto all men once to die.* No vice, however pleaſing, can be of long duration; no iniquity, however proſperous, can conſtitute laſting happineſs. Soon will the preſent tranſitory ſcene diſappear; and the pleaſures of the world, and the world itſelf, vaniſh from my ſight: *Let me then keep innocence, and take heed to the thing that is right; for that alone can bring me peace at the laſt.*"

But further: We ſhould conſider death as an event not only certain and inevitable; but as removed at no great, tho' an uncertain, diſtance. Were human life protracted to the ſame extent as before the flood, or were millions of years added to its natural term, even then it would be our undoubted wiſdom to conſider our latter end. But when life is reduced to the narrow compaſs of three or four ſcore years, and when much the greater part of mankind are not permitted to reach one half even of that contracted ſpan, it then ſurely becomes us to conſider with ſerioufneſs the ſhort duration of theſe mortal bodies, which bring into the world with them the principles of decay and diſſolution, and are deſtined by the law of their nature to ſee corruption. It becomes us to reflect, that *our days are as an handbreadth, and our age as nothing;* that *man cometh up, and flouriſheth as a flower in the field, and is as ſoon cut down, and withered.*

For how fleeting and tranſitory is life! at the longeſt, how ſhort! and at the beſt how frail! What is it, but *a ſhadow that departeth, a vapour that appeareth for a little time, and vaniſheth away?* What repeated monitions have we of its frailty and uncertainty! How many melancholy proofs are ever occurring to us, that man, *in his higheſt, beſt eſtate, is altogether vanity!* Expoſed to the power of a thouſand accidents, the arrows of death are perpetually flying around us; and ſo many, ſo various, and unſeen, are the cauſes of mortality, that we can neither know the time nor manner of our departure. Life and time are ſo unequally diſpenſed, and in ſuch different portions, that no man may know the exact mea-

ſure of his days, nor be certified how long he has to live. Some live long, and ſee good days; and at laſt, by a gentle and gradual decay, the lamp of life goes ſlowly out. Others are ſnatched away in the midſt of their years, and their light extinguiſhed when appearing in its brighteſt luſtre.

In the midſt of life we are in death, i. e. ſubject to its power; but in what ſhape, or what ſtage of life, it will exert its power, is a knowledge we cannot attain. How long we may be permitted to walk before the LORD in the land of the living, or how ſoon we may deſcend into the chambers of the grave; whether the violence of external injury may forcibly diſſolve the union between ſoul and body, or whether the inward diſorder of our frame may render it neceſſary that the duſt return unto the earth, and the ſpirit unto GOD that gave it; whether we may long lie on the bed of languiſhment, or whether we ſhall go down to the grave, as it is ſaid we ſhall riſe again, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye; whether death ſhall with a gentle hand cloſe our eyes without pain or apprehenſion, or whether he will march with all his terrors in array againſt us; whether our days ſhall be long in the land which the LORD our GOD giveth us, or whether we ſhall go whence none return, in the prime and vigour of our years; whether the evening of life may be bright, calm, and ſerene, or whether our ſun may ſet in clouds;—HE alone, from whom no ſecrets are hid, can determine.

If, then, we know not the meaſure of our days; if we know neither the hour nor manner of our death, nor how ſoon we may be ſummoned to depart hence and be no more ſeen; we ought well to conſider how frail and uncertain our condition is, to wait the doubtful hour, to be always prepared, that our LORD, when he cometh, may find us watching.

Again, we ſhould conſider death as an event that will conſign us to an immediate ſtate of happineſs or miſery. The Pſalmiſt, indeed, addreſſing himſelf to the Supreme Being, ſays, *In death there is no remembrance of thee, and in the grave who will give thee thanks? The dead praiſe not thee, O Lord, neither they that go down to the grave.* But we are not hence to conclude, that the

grave

grave puts a period to our being. All that ought to be inferred from theſe, or other ſimilar expreſſions, is, that, with regard to this world, we ſeem wholly devoid of ſenſation, incapable of pleaſure or pain, joy or ſorrow, virtue or vice; for *there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wiſdom, in the grave, whither thou goeſt.*

Some who admit the future exiſtence of departed ſouls, have yet conceived that their happineſs or miſery does not commence till the great day of retribution; and that the ſoul ſleeps in a ſtate of continued inſenſibility, till reunited to the body at the general reſurrection. Among other falſe terrors with which death is clothed, this is not the leaſt diſconſolate image of it, that it is a ſtate of darkneſs and oblivion without thought or ſenſation; where all the powers of the ſoul are chained up, and we are reduced to the ſame unconſcious, inanimate ſtate with our kindred earth, from whence we are formed. Human nature muſt ſhrink at ſo gloomy a proſpect; and the good man, when departing from the world, muſt be much diſcomforted, when he reflects, that he is entering into a region of ſilence and of inſenſibility, where all his thoughts periſh, where all his pious labours will profit him nothing, and where virtue and vice, juſtice and iniquity, the good and the bad, ſhall alike lie down in the duſt, and, during the interval of a long ſucceſſion of ages, ſleep undiſtinguiſhed.

In anſwer to which opinion, it may ſuffice to obſerve, that our Saviour's reply to the malefactor upon the croſs was, *This day thou ſhalt be with me in paradiſe.* By which expreſſion our LORD cannot be ſuppoſed to mean, that death would deliver him over to a ſtate of unconſciouſneſs: For were this the ſtate of departed ſouls, and this the intention of our LORD, he had promiſed nothing but what muſt equally have happened without ſuch promiſe; he had given him no preference above his fellow-ſufferer, and the hardened unrepenting criminal had been as much in paradiſe as the reformed and forgiven penitent.

It is evident, therefore, that by that expreſſion of our LORD was meant an intermediate ſtate of felicity antecedent to the final judgment into which he was to enter. After death, though the body ſleeps in corruption

till

till its ſcattered duſt be re-collected at the laſt day, yet the ſoul ſhall awake and live; ſhall ſubſiſt in its proper place, till the trumpet ſhall ſound, and the dead ſhall be raiſed; when our happineſs will be more complete, and receive its final conſummation; and we ſhall become as the angels in heaven, confirmed and eſtabliſhed in virtue and felicity.

II. The utility of the religious conſideration of death was the ſecond thing I propoſed to obſerve.

And, *1ſt*, It diſcovers to us the unimportance and vanity of all temporal enjoyments; which, however ſatisfactory or delightful, are yet ſhort and tranſitory. It evinces the indiſcretion of an intemperate attachment to the world. It ſerves to extend our views, and elevate our deſires. And though the bleſſings of this life are ſuch as we may with alacrity receive, and ought with gratitude to acknowledge; meant by Providence to render our paſſage through this vale of tears leſs irkſome and unpleaſant, to ſweeten the bitter cup, and in ſome meaſure turn our heavineſs into joy; yet fleeting is the joy, and its pleaſures but for a ſeaſon. All ſublunary enjoyments are what we can place no dependence on, what we cannot long poſſeſs, what we muſt reſign with our breath; and claim, therefore, only a portion of our care. But our ſtate hereafter is eternal and unchangeable; the ſalvation of the ſoul is Heaven's laſt, greateſt bleſſing, and demands our utmoſt attention.

This world, indeed, has little more to recommend it than the hopes and expectations it gives us of another, and this life ſhould be eſteemed chiefly as preparatory and introductory to a future.

But further: the religious conſideration of death is the beſt guard of innocence and virtue. Temptations ſurround us on all ſides. The corruption of our nature, and the ſeducement of the world, are in a perpetual combination and confederacy againſt our happineſs. Every ſituation of life lies expoſed to dangers, and in many things we all offend. To prevent which, nothing can be better adapted, nothing more effectual, than ſerious meditations on that eternity into which we muſt ſoon, and may ſuddenly, enter. As all worldly diſtinctions,

tinctions, pomp, and power, and pleaſure, and poſſeſſions, and whatever elſe the world calls happineſs, will, at the ſolemn hour of a departing ſoul, loſe all the reputed value, and be no longer of uſe; ſo the ſeducements they offer muſt loſe much of their power and influence, when we reflect on the ſhort and uncertain duration of theſe earthly tenements of ours, *theſe houſes of clay, whoſe foundations are in the duſt.*

Laſtly, The conſideration of the certainty of our diſſolution, as it is the moſt powerful incentive to a good life, is the beſt preparative for a comfortable death. Nothing diſſipates the fears of death ſo much as due preparation for it; nothing ſo effectually diſarms it of its terrors, as the conſciouſneſs of integrity, of our attention to pleaſe our Maker in the general conduct of our lives, and of our penitent concern for particular miſcarriages. Happy they who have kept at a diſtance from the criminal purſuits, the guilty follies and corruptions, of the world; and have made ſuch careful preparation for an hereafter, that they can, without ſelf-reproach, review the years that are paſt, and look forward to a future life without apprehenſion or terror; can with pious confidence look beyond the grave, and there behold, not a court of ſevere juſtice, but a throne of mercy; not an offended, reſentful Judge, but a reconciled Father and Saviour.

May it be our great and habitual concern to prepare to obey the ſolemn call, whenever it ſhall pleaſe the LORD of life and death to ſummon us to depart hence; that at the awful hour we may calmly lie down in peace, in hopes of awaking in a ſtate of immortal felicity, of being introduced into the preſence of the KING of heaven, and of being received with that happy congratulation, *Well done, good and faithful ſervant, enter thou into the joy of thy Lord!*

SERMON XX.

On Trust in God.

JER. xvii. 7.

Bleſſed is the man that truſteth in the Lord, and whoſe hope the Lord is.

WE are by nature formed with an inextinguiſhable deſire of happineſs, and have ſomething within us that irreſiſtibly impels us to the purſuit of it. But ſurrounded as we are with troubles, which we may complain of, but cannot redreſs; expoſed to dangers we may always fear, but cannot always eſcape; and full of wants, which we are impatient, but unable to ſupply;—we ſoon become conſcious of our inability to attain the happineſs we purſue, and are ſoon taught the neceſſity of looking abroad for aſſiſtance to ſupport our weakneſs, to ſupply our wants, and protect us from our fears. Our general error is, that we overlook the proper object of our confidence. We place our dependence on inferior cauſes, too inattentive to that Firſt Supreme Cauſe, from whom alone can come our preſent or future ſalvation. But if reaſon does not, experience ſeldom fails to bring with it full conviction of the vanity of all temporal dependences. To a ſuperior Power, then, we muſt have recourſe: we muſt look up for ſupport to where religion directs; to HIM whoſe kingdom is univerſal nature, to whom all things are in ſubjection, and without whoſe permiſſion nothing can approach to hurt us. And it is our invaluable privilege, that we are permitted and authoriſed to repoſe a confidence in that Power whom all nature obeys.

But becauſe a juſt confidence differs from a groundleſs preſumption, I ſhall in this diſcourſe conſider, *1ſt*, What is a juſt confidence in GOD; *2dly*, When our confidence is well grounded; and, *laſtly*, The happineſs reſulting from a well-grounded truſt in him.

I. Let

I. Let us conſider what is a juſt confidence in God. This duty implies an humble dependence on him for that protection, and thoſe bleſſings, which his ſupreme perfections both enable and incline him to beſtow on his creatures. To truſt in God, is to entertain a full conviction of his goodneſs and mercy; and a ſteady hope, that that mercy will on all occaſions, in all our dangers and neceſſities, be extended to us, in ſuch a manner as to his wiſdom appears moſt conducive, if not to our tranquillity in this life, to our everlaſting felicity in the next. In all circumſtances, proſperous or adverſe, whatever be our ſituation, or however gloomy our proſpect, whether danger be approaching or preſent, our ſouls muſt wait ſtill upon God, our eyes muſt be lifted up to him the great Arbiter of all events: for he, infinitely merciful and gracious, is at all times, in all emergencies, as willing as he is able to ſupport and protect his creatures; never inacceſſible to their addreſſes, never inexorable to their prayers, nor indifferent to their afflictions.

We are not indeed to expect, that his wiſdom, infinitely ſuperior to ours, will always comply with our expectations, and favour us with the particular objects of our deſire; for this were to direct and govern his providence, not to truſt in him: but we are to live under an habitual ſenſe of his care and protection, and an aſſurance that under that protection we ſhall obtain what is good for us; which is more than we could promiſe ourſelves, were the diſpenſations of Providence to be under our direction. This duty can hardly be ſo far miſapprehended, as to repreſs the efforts of induſtry, or be ſuppoſed to ſuperſede the neceſſity of due care and application to the employment and duties of our reſpective ſtations. For we have no grounds to expect, that God will provide for our intereſts, if we are improvident ourſelves; or that he will, by a particular interpoſition, favour the idle and the negligent. But when we have performed all that on our part is requiſite; when all prudent care and attention have been employed, and every honeſt effort exerted, we need then be no farther ſollicitous; we may diſmiſs our fears: we

may

may then confide in the wiſdom and goodneſs of the Guardian of our nature; aſſured, that we are objects of his providence; that he is always vigilant over us; and that where our care terminates, the divine care will take place. Let the duty and buſineſs of to-day be our concern; the event of to-morrow we may truſt to GOD.

II Let us conſider when our confidence in GOD is well grounded. And here we muſt obſerve, that our dependence or confidence in GOD, is founded upon his favour, and his favour is to be obtained only by our obedience. Whence it follows, that in ſuch meaſure as we tranſgreſs the laws of GOD, in equal degree we undermine the foundation of our truſt in him. Where our obedience is imperfect, there our truſt is diminiſhed, but not deſtroyed; where our tranſgreſſion is abſolute, there our confidence is abſolutely loſt. Thus our firſt progenitor, after preſuming to diſobey that injunction which was the appointed teſt of his duty and allegiance, loſt all confidence in his MAKER, fled from his preſence, and trembled with awful apprehenſions of vengeance. *I heard thy voice,* ſaid our guilty parent to his CREATOR, *and was afraid.* And in like manner muſt every flagitious ſinner be afraid, when he hears his MAKER ſpeaking to him, either from heaven, or in the ſtill voice of conſcience.

Our confidence, then muſt riſe or fall, according to the progreſs or defects of our obedience. Conſcious of right intentions, and approved by our own heart, we may approach the throne of grace with ſuperior aſſurance. If our heart in ſome degree condemn us, we may have our intervals of diffidence and apprehenſion; but if, unreclaimed, we go on ſtill in wickedneſs, and perſiſt in determined diſobedience; ſhould we then truſt in GOD, it were, in the moſt literal and criminal ſenſe, to hope againſt hope. Till we repent, and return to duty, we can have no expectations of favour, no confidence in our MAKER; nor can we lift up our eyes to heaven with any hopes of mercy and forgiveneſs there.

But let it be obſerved, that however faulty or criminal we may have been, though the nature or number of

of our offences ſhould ſuggeſt to us the diſpleaſure of the DEITY, and give us grounds to fear that his protection and his grace may have deſerted us; that he may have withdrawn from us the light of his countenance, and the conſolations of his Holy Spirit; and that his mercy to us may be clean gone, and come utterly to an end for evermore;—even here in this afflictive diſorder, the moſt afflictive that the human heart can feel, even here we need not give way to deſpondency: let us return to GOD, and he will return to us; let us look up to the FATHER of mercies; let us, with holy violence, importune his favour and forgiveneſs; let us, with unfeigned humiliation and amendment, endeavour to blot out our crimes, and expiate paſt offences; and we may then reſume confidence, and our hopes may ſecurely reſt on the benignity of our heavenly Parent, who deſireth not the death of a ſinner; who is abundant in goodneſs, who never forgets to be gracious, and whoſe mercy pardons as often as we repent.

III. I proceed, in the laſt place, to obſerve the happineſs reſulting from a well-grounded dependence on GOD. Certain it is, that every other project we can form of ſecurity, will, upon inquiry, appear defective in its plan, and precarious in the event; depending for ſucceſs on various contingencies, on the aid, perhaps, of fellow-creatures, whoſe frame is frail and periſhing, whoſe power is limited and feeble, and whoſe inclinations are fluctuating and uncertain. And if any of theſe circumſtances ſhould fail us, (and we can depend on none), our projects and our hopes are at an end. But he whoſe conſcience ſpeaks conſolation, and bids him confide in his GOD, confides in a Wiſdom which ſees the remoteſt iſſues of all events, on a power which ordereth all things, and on a goodneſs which ever conſults the well-being of his creatures.

And though this gives him no abſolute inſurance againſt evils, no privilege of exemption from calamities and afflictions; yet he feels the weight of them much abated by internal conſolations. He acquieſces in all the diſpenſations of Heaven, ſubmits with humble reſignation to the ſeverities of Providence; aſſured, that GOD alone can know what is beſt, what is moſt expedient

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his preſent circumſtances, and what moſt inſtrumental to his future felicity. God, may he juſtly ſay, while I pay him the homage of due obedience, will be too merciful to neglect my happineſs, and is too wiſe to be deceived in the moſt effectual means and propereſt ſeaſons of conferring it. With theſe ſentiments, he proceeds in his voyage through this ocean of life; reſigned to the will, and confiding in the protection of Providence; enjoying the preſent ſerenity, without apprehenſion of future tempeſts. But if the clouds ſhould gather, and the ſtorm ariſe, and the floods lift up their waves, and all around be diſtreſs and trouble, his heart is eſtabliſhed, and will not ſhrink from his confidence in that Supreme Ruler, who can rebuke the ſtorm; can ſave when we are ready to periſh; and need only ſay, "Peace, be ſtill," and immediately there will be a calm. In every ſituation, his mind repoſes itſelf on God. In the darkeſt night of affliction, ſome light will ſpring up, ſome beam of joy dart upon his mind, from this conſideration, that the God whom he ſerves is able to deliver, and in his own good time will deliver him out of all his troubles, or reward him with joys unſpeakable in his own bliſsful preſence. Thus *bleſſed is the man whoſe hope the Lord is.*

But, on the other hand, they who take not God for their ſtrength, but build all their hopes upon their power, their riches, their reputation, their friendſhips, and the like, build upon a weak and treacherous foundation. Stability is not the property of any worldly poſſeſſion. A thouſand unforeſeen cauſes may deprive them of ſuch objects of their confidence, and too late convince them of the vanity of all temporal dependences. If they place their dependence on character and reputation, theſe may be ſoon blaſted by popular breath; if on friendſhip, that often falls a ſacrifice to clandeſtine whiſpers and artful inſinuations: riches, by many ſecret ways, make themſelves wings; and power, even the greateſt, ſtands on a foundation which various engines are continually at work to undermine.

But ſuch dependences, beſides their uncertainty, are often utterly ineffectual and vain in thoſe hours of diſtreſs when we ſtand in moſt need of ſupport. If, for inſtance,

ſtance, ſickneſs approaches, who but GOD can preſcribe bounds to it, and ſay, Hitherto ſhalt thou come, and no farther: If conſcience ſhould ſmite us with a ſenſe of guilt, and the ſpirit be wounded within us, can man, can the whole world, ſay to the deſponding ſinner, *Son, be of good cheer, thy ſins be forgiven thee?*

From whence let us make this practical application, that he, and he alone, who has GOD for his confidence, whoſe conſcious integrity gives him well-grounded aſſurances of the divine favour, has ſuch an internal comforter in his breaſt as will ſupport him under all the viciſſitudes of this mortal life; will make trouble in ſome degree ſit eaſily on him; will inſpire fortitude in the midſt of dangers; will carry him through the rugged paths of adverſity; will ſweeten the bitter waters of affliction; will diſarm our laſt enemy of his terrors, and render even our diſſolution a happy emigration to a ſtate of immortality.

Let us then, while we have opportunity, endeavour to acquire this greateſt of all conſolations, this confidence in our GOD by an univerſal obedience to his laws. Let this obedience be the ground-work in our plan of happineſs. On this foundation we may build the firmeſt hopes, and ſecurely truſt, that the GOD whom we ſerve will with his favourable kindneſs defend us as with a ſhield; will bleſs us with his gracious protection in this world; and in the world to come will receive us into that fullneſs of bliſs, which no language can deſcribe, and no human intellect can as yet comprehend.

SERMON

SERMON XXI.

On univerſal OBEDIENCE.

LUKE i. 6.

Walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord, blameleſs.

THAT ſin and wickedneſs muſt render us juſt objects of the divine diſpleaſure, and expoſe us to deſerved puniſhment here or hereafter, is a ſentiment which nature ſuggeſts, and has engraven on our hearts in characters too deep for all the arts of irreligion ever to efface. This ſentiment muſt ſometimes occur to us in our hours of reflection; muſt ſometimes force its way into the mind, through all the obſtacles we can employ to exclude and guard our attention from it. The good man is indeed under no temptation to exclude it from his thoughts; as to him it brings no terrors or diſquietudes, and ſerves only to ſupport and eſtabliſh his integrity. But ſinners feel the apprehenſions of it ſo painful, it ſo often mingles gall with their pleaſures, and ſo much embitters every enjoyment, that all the projects, artifices, and deluſions of ſin, are employed to weaken its impreſſions, and reſcue them from their fears.

Hence it is, that ſome are inclined to take refuge in Atheiſm; ſome in a partial religion; ſome endeavour, by diſbelief, to remove the Almighty Object of their fear; others hope he may be appeaſed by a very imperfect obedience. But the exiſtence of a God is ſo obvious and apparent to our firſt reflections, the whole Creation is ſo clear a demonſtration of a CREATOR, that recourſe is oftener had to ſome mediating expedients, which may reconcile vice and duty, and provide an equal ſatisfaction for the different demands of inclination and religion. And of theſe projects none has perhaps more generally prevailed than an opinion, that GOD will accept of a partial, defective obedience; as the

the infirmities of the nature he has given us render a perfect and univerſal obſervance of his laws utterly impracticable.

Hence it is, that ſome ſatisfy themſelves with a very lax, incomplete morality; practiſing the virtues they approve, neglecting others to which they have no inclination; and prevail on their conſciences to acquieſce in the avowed violation of ſome duties, while they think they ſupply this defect by a faithful and ſtrict obſervance of others.

It may be proper, therefore, to undeceive thoſe who are thus willing to deceive themſelves in ſo important a point, by ſhowing, that GOD requires an equal attention to all his laws; that we can come to no compoſition with him, by offering a part inſtead of the whole debt we owe him; that while we live in an habitual tranſgreſſion of ſome duties, we can give him no equivalent in a punctual obſervance of others; and that we ought to aim at the character given to Zacharias and Eliſabeth in the text, and walk *in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameleſs*. To this end, I ſhall ſhow, *1ſt*, In what ſenſe an univerſal obedience is required; and, *2dly*, Our obligation to obſerve it.

I. It is neceſſary, above all things, that our obedience be not partial; that we attend not to one duty, one ſpecies of virtue, one part of right conduct, to the neglect of others, but regard with equal and ſincere zeal every precept of religion. We muſt be conſiſtently and thoroughly good, if we would be ſo effectually. We muſt yield ourſelves entirely and univerſally to the government of conſcience, conquer every adverſe paſſion, ſubdue every oppoſite inclination; or lay no claim to true virtue, and give up all hopes of the felicity in reſerve for it.

But, it is not meant that we are to be perfect; abſolutely free from every failure; never to be ſurpriſed into any irregularity by inadvertence or the ſudden ferment of our paſſions: for this is a happineſs, devoutly to be wiſhed indeed, but not to be attained till we aſcend to where the ſpirits of juſt men are made perfect. Such is the preſent unhappineſs of our frame, that ſome weakneſſes and infirmities will cleave to the beſt; and

it is morally impoſſible always to keep our paſſions under ſuch ſevere diſcipline and ſtrict regulation, that they ſhall never precipitate or betray us into a conduct which our reaſon may diſapprove. But offences of this venial nature GOD will not be extreme to mark, nor viſit them with future inflictions. Far be that from the Judge of the whole earth,—far from a gracious and merciful GOD: for who then could be ſaved? who, in a ſtrict ſenſe, is righteous? who can deceive himſelf ſo far as to ſay he has never ſinned?

The nature of ſin conſiſts in an oppoſition of our will to the will of GOD. When, therefore, weakneſs, inadvertence, or ſurpriſe, betray us into an irregular action, in which there is little or no intended concurrence of the will, we ſhould ſeem to be more the objects of pity than of condemnation; and ſuch an action appears rather the effect of native infirmity, than an actual crime. But though a complete, unfailing obedience, is a tribute which the Sovereign of the world does not exact, nor can the infirmity of our nature pay; yet he requires an equal regard to all his laws, and forbids the habitual indulgence of any ſingle vice. It muſt indeed be admitted, that natural diſpoſition, habits acquired by education, and confirmed by practice, the influence of example, our ſituation in the world, and the ſeducements we happen to be expoſed to, may render the obſervance of ſome particular duties no eaſy taſk. But in ſuch caſes GOD regards the rectitude of our intentions: if we do all in our power to pleaſe GOD, we cannot offend him; if we faithfully endeavour not to violate our duty, we perform it. But if we deliberately refuſe obedience to any one law, and live in an habitual determined neglect of it,—this is, not merely to offend, but to rebel: this is not infirmity or frailty, but a reſolved oppoſition to, and an avowed defiance of, the authority of the divine Lawgiver.——Which leads me,

II. To conſider the obligation we are under to pay an univerſal obedience to his laws. *Whoſoever*, ſays our Saviour, *ſhall break one of the leaſt commandments, and ſhall teach men ſo, ſhall be called the leaſt in the kingdom of heaven:* i. e. Whoever by his doctrine or practice, makes void or tranſgreſſes the divine commands, by the omiſſion

omiſſion of any known duty, or the commiſſion of any known ſin, ſhall be the leaſt, or (as it has been interpreted) ſhall have no place in the kingdom of heaven. Strict, unreſerved obedience is what the ſcriptures every where enjoin.

The divine ſanction is alike impreſſed on every law of GOD; and to go on in a cuſtomary tract of diſobeying him in any one injunction, is in effect to diſclaim all obedience to him. No one part of our moral duty is intrinſically more ſacred and indiſpenſable than another; nor have we grounds to believe that GOD will pardon the deliberate, habitual tranſgreſſion of any one of his laws. For if GOD might, conſiſtently with the rectitude and perfection of his nature, excuſe or pardon one habitual tranſgreſſion, why not another, and another, and conſequently why not all? His mercy is indeed ever inclined to meet and receive the returning penitent, and to blot out the remembrance of thoſe ſins which are forſaken; but moſt certainly he will not pardon any one ſpecies of iniquity in which we wilfully and impenitently perſevere.

Let it be conſidered, that the reaſon againſt all ſin is the ſame, *viz.* the divine prohibition; and if that be our motive for ſhunning any criminal behaviour, it may be expected to have an equal influence on every part of our conduct. If we abſtain from any one ſin, ſolely for this reaſon, Becauſe it is offenſive to the infinite purity and holineſs of GOD, we ſhall find the ſame motive ſtill more extenſive in its operation, and urging us to avoid every occaſion of incurring his diſpleaſure. But if we ſelect only ſome virtues that happen not to thwart our temper and inclinations, while we neglect others equally neceſſary and indiſpenſable, we can hardly be ſuppoſed to act, even in thoſe inſtances wherein our conduct ſeems to be laudable, from a regard to duty, or the authority of our Maker. The habitual violation of any one divine law, or the retention of any one favourite vice, demonſtrates, that had we equal temptations, we ſhould equally tranſgreſs in other inſtances. As long as any paſſion preſerves an aſcendency over us, and remains rebellious and lawleſs, there is plainly ſomething within us more regarded than duty, ſomething more prevalent

than virtue; ſomething that maſters and ſubdues it; God and Conſcience have not the dominion: till we poſſeſs an equal, entire affection for goodneſs, we poſſeſs none that is truly acceptable; nor can be reputed of much value.

But if an uniform, unreſerved, and complete obedience, be required; if the purity of the divine nature muſt diſapprove every degree and ſpecies of iniquity; if he forbids the commiſſion of any one ſin, or the violation of a ſingle duty;—who then, may the ſinner urge, can be ſaved? If ſo *ſtrait is the gate, and ſo narrow the path, that leads to eternal life*, no wonder, he may think, *if there be few that find it.*

Where then, may he ſay, is the goodneſs of the Creator? where the mercies of the Goſpel; and what are the gracious promiſes that are contained in it; But notwithſtanding what may be thus urged, moſt certain it is, that it is our own fault, if we are not objects of thoſe mercies, and partakers of thoſe promiſes. Strict, indeed, is our religion, and pure and holy are its precepts; they would otherwiſe be unbecoming the purity of that Being who enjoined them. But he expects not perfection from imperfect beings; he requires not from men the purity of angels: he impoſes no heavier burden than he has given us ability to bear: he requires from us only what is in our power,—an honeſt and ſincere, not a perfect, unerring obſervance of his laws.

If, then, it appears, that our obligation to every duty is ſacred and indiſpenſable; and if we are apt to retain and cheriſh with partial indulgence ſome one vice, ſome favourite failing, which by flattering our inclinations, recommends itſelf perhaps almoſt imperceptibly to us, —how much reaſon have we to look with an attentive eye into our heart, and carefully obſerve all its movements and propenſions? None but the moſt abandoned will go on in an open and avowed courſe of impiety; and a perſon of but common virtue will be ſhocked at the commiſſion of an atrocious and glaring crime: but the greateſt danger is, leſt we ſhould not ſufficiently guard againſt thoſe vices, which, recommended by cuſtom or faſhion, or introduced under the diſguiſe

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perhaps, and reſemblance, of ſome virtue, gradually and inſenſibly inſinuate themſelves into our affections, whilſt we are inattentive, and think our piety ſecure.

Let us therefore often inſpect and examine our hearts, and look well if there be any way of wickedneſs in us; and let us reſolve to diſmiſs every ſinful inclination as ſoon as diſcovered, and to retain none, though ever ſo ſecret, nor ſpare it, though ever ſo beloved. Vices are the diſeaſes of the mind: a complication of them is not required: one inveterate diſorder is ſufficient to ruin the ſoul's health, and endanger its ſalvation.

For though GOD will not be extreme to mark what is amiſs, not extreme to mark infirmities or imperfections; yet he will not confer heaven on thoſe who wilfully and deliberately go on in the habitual practice of any one tranſgreſſion; nor does he in the goſpel give them any grounds to believe that they will ever be the objects of his favour, or ever be put on a level with thoſe who pay a ſincere obedience to the whole law. We have no grounds to think, that the ſupreme Lawgiver will for our ſake ſoften and relax the terms of ſalvation; or that he will grant a diſpenſation for favourite paſſions, or permit us to ſelect from the catalogue of duties ſuch as moſt recommend themſelves to our taſte.

In every inſtance, his authority is ſacred, and demands univerſal ſubmiſſion. We muſt offer up our whole heart to GOD; and this ſacrifice, like thoſe preſcribed by the Moſaic law, muſt be entire and without blemiſh.

Let us then remember, that religion requires an uniform regard to the whole ſyſtem of duties. Let no vice become ſuch a favourite as to gain indulgence, and no duty appear of ſuch ſlight conſequence as to be overlooked and neglected. We ought indeed to give greater attention to the more important duties, ſuch as piety to GOD, and juſtice and benevolence to men; but yet no grace nor virtue of inferior conſideration is to be overlooked, and no ſin to be thought unimportant or trivial which may offend GOD, and endanger and diminiſh our future portion of happineſs. Let us then have

reſpect unto all God's commandments: let our ways be ſo direct, that we may keep all his ſtatutes: let us give a general diſcharge to all irregular deſires, and all falſe ways let us utterly abhor.

SERMON XXII.

On the univerſal PRESENCE and KNOWLEDGE of GOD.

PROV. v. 21.

The ways of man are before the eyes of the Lord, and he pondereth all his goings.

THE DEITY has been pleaſed to communicate to his creatures, by reaſon and revelation, only a limited information concerning himſelf. It is not in this world given to us to ſee or know the Supreme BEING as he is; we cannot find out the Almighty to perfection; clouds and thick darkneſs are round about him; his nature infinitely ſurpaſſes all our conceptions. But yet our knowledge of him may ſuffice, and our ideas are clear enough, for all the purpoſes of morality and duty. The knowledge of the Divine Nature, ſo far as is neceſſary to virtue and religion, may be acquired by a common underſtanding: but more than this, human ſagacity and penetration will in vain attempt to inveſtigate.

That there is a GOD, the Creator and moral Governor of the world; that it is his will that we ſhould do juſtly and love mercy, and obſerve and practiſe all the virtues and duties that reaſon and nature ſuggeſt; that he approves and will reward the good, and diſapprove the diſobedient,—are truths as evident as they are uſeful: truths which lie level and obvious to the mind; which

which Reaſon, when its eye is not blinded, cannot fail to diſcern; and without which, virtue, morality, or true religion, would but ill ſubſiſt. But that God ſhould thus limit our knowledge of him; that he ſhould unveil juſt ſo much of his nature as religion requires to be known, and is requiſite to direct and conduct us to univerſal virtue; ſhould ſeem to intimate, that the duties of religion and virtue ought to be our firſt objects, and an attention to them the principal concernment of life.

The doctrine of the text, relative to the divine Being, is an important and uſeful truth. For what can have a more extenſive moral influence, or more effectually arm and guard us againſt all ſeducements to vice, and keep up our attention to duty, and animate us to every virtuous exertion, than a firm perſuaſion, and frequent recollection, that the ways of men are before the eyes of the Lord, and that he pondereth all our goings; that we are always under his inſpection; that no obſcurity, no ſolitude can conceal us from him; that even the darkeſt and moſt ſecret retirement in the world, the human heart, is naked before him, and lies open to his view?

Such ſentiments of the Divine Omnipreſence ſhould render us particularly attentive to our whole conduct; and deter us, not only from flagrant and deliberate offences, but from ſuch leſſer failures as are incident from inattention and neglect: ſhould animate us, not only to hold faſt our integrity, and act always with the pureſt and moſt upright intentions; but to excel in every virtue, to adorn ourſelves with every moral grace that can recommend us to the favour of that Being who is righteous in all his ways and holy in all his works.

Certain it is, that God is every where preſent; that he exiſts at all times in all places. His Being ſurpaſſes all bounds, is diffuſed through all extent, coexiſts and is preſent with all things; for in him all things have their being. And as he exiſts in all places, ſo he neceſſarily perceives and knows all things. His knowledge is commenſurate with his exiſtence, abſolutely unlimited, infinite as his duration, boundleſs as his immenſity. No actions or ſentiments can exiſt without his inſtantaneous inſpection.

ſpection. His knowledge, in reſpect of univerſal nature, is like the ſun with regard to this lower world,—— nothing can be hid from the light thereof.

Our actions particularly we are aſſured, are the objects of his knowledge. *The ways of man*, ſays Solomon in the text, *are before the eyes of the Lord, and he pondereth all his goings.* He ſeeth all his doings, he marketh all his ſteps. The LORD is a GOD of knowledge; by him actions are weighed: and there is no darkneſs, nor ſhadow of death, where the workers of iniquity can be hid. *Doth he not ſee all my ways*, ſays Job, *and count all my ſteps?* He not only ſees and obſerves our actions, but all the circumſtances that attend them, all the degrees of good or evil that are in them, even ſuch as are unknown and imperceptible to ourſelves.

But not only our exterior conduct is viſible and apparent to him, but alſo the motives upon which we act, the views we have in acting, the diſpoſition of our minds, our darkeſt and moſt retired thoughts and intentions. The LORD ſearcheth all hearts, and underſtandeth all the imaginations of the thoughts. *The Lord*, ſays Solomon, *weigheth the ſpirits*; i. e. has a perfect diſcernment and knowledge of the heart as men have of thoſe things which they weigh with accuracy in a balance. He is always with us; always ſurrounds us with his preſence, penetrates into the inmoſt receſſes of the ſoul, obſerves all its movements, diſcerns its moſt ſecret purpoſes. Nothing, indeed, can be hid from thoſe eyes which are every where, and to which all things are naked and open, all hearts uncovered and tranſparent.

But though it is an undoubted certainty, that GOD is thus preſent in every place, preſent to all we do and all we think; yet of the mode or manner of the divine preſence and perception, we can form no idea. This may be one of thoſe ſecret things belonging to GOD, which the human intellect cannot at preſent comprehend; or which, if underſtood, would be of no ſervice,—bring with it no advantage to the cauſe of virtue and religion; the principal if not the ſole end of GOD's revealing himſelf to man.

It is, doubtleſs expedient and neceſſary, in order to keep us ſteady in the paths of duty; and highly conſequential

quential to our happineſs here and hereafter; that we ſhould be aſſured, that the eye of GOD is ever open to obſerve all our thoughts and actions; that the darkneſs and light to him are both alike; that he is intimate to our ſpirits; that as well may we attempt to conceal our ſentiments from ourſelves as from his all-ſeeing eye, and therefore theſe important truths have been revealed. But if we proceed further to aſk, How can the Divine BEING penetrate the heart? how diſcern our thoughts? how ſee the ſecret part we act in our breaſt? what we do inviſibly, in imagination only and deſign?——theſe particulars it is not poſſible,———we may preſume, therefore, not needful for us to know.

But although the manner in which the Supreme BEING diſcerns our thoughts or actions may be far above our comprehenſion; yet we may affirm, negatively, that *he doth not ſee as man ſeeth.* The ſcriptures indeed repreſent him generally, as it were, in the likeneſs of men, with his eyes upon our ways, and his ears open to our prayers; expreſſions that are uſed in condeſcenſion to the defects of human language, and to the weakneſs of human apprehenſion, which is ſo imperfect and limited, that we cannot form a conception how objects can be ſeen or heard without the inſtrumentality of proper organs. But it is more ſuitable to the nature of HIM in whom we live and have our being, to conceive him preſent and privy to all our thoughts and actions, in ſome ſuch manner as our minds are preſent to their own ſentiments and ideas.

Let us then reflect, how attentive we ought to be to our whole conduct, how guarded and circumſpect in all we do and all we think,——as we are at this, and every moment of our lives, under the immediate ever watchful inſpection of an infinitely wiſe, and pure, and righteous, and powerful Being, who pondereth all our ways, obſerves and records all our actions and intentions, and will alſo one day bring every work into judgment, with every ſecret thing whether it be good, or whether it be evil. Then GOD, whoſe eye NOTHING can eſcape, will pronounce on every one a juſt and irreverſible ſentence, The evil we only intended, though not committed, ſhall not go unpuniſhed: the good we only

only designed, and for want of power could not accomplish, shall not be unrewarded.

What is it then that can tempt us to offend our MAKER, in opposition to the most powerful, and did not experience otherwise inform us, we should think, irresistible motives and incitements to obedience? When the dishoneſt, fraudulent man, misemploys his understanding, given for a far different and better purpose, in overreaching and defrauding others, injuring and oppressing those whom he ought to protect and assist; let him remember, that the eye of a most powerful and righteous GOD is upon him, whose vengeance he can no more escape, than he can hide his iniquity from his view; and he must surely resolve to turn from his wickedness, and do what is lawful and right. Does the heart of the proud, vain man, swell and dilate with the idea of his supposed eminence and presumed distinction? let him consider in whose presence he stands; in the presence of that infinitely glorious BEING, the Sovereign of the universe, in whose sight man is but a worm, all the nations of the earth as the dust of the balance; and he must feel what the son of Sirach long ago observed, That pride was not made for man. Do we at any time assume the veil of piety, and put on the mask of religion, and honour GOD with our lips whilst our heart is far from him? let us reflect, how thin the veil we wear, and how transparent to the eye of GOD.

While thus what passes within us we think secure from human observation, let us ask ourselves, Doth not HE that pondereth the heart, consider it? and he that keepeth our soul, doth not HE know it? Nothing can put a more effectual check to iniquity, irregularity, or impropriety of conduct, than a due sense of the Divine Presence; a sense and conviction, that all our ways are before GOD; that he stands at our right-hand; that to his view are exposed our most secret follies and iniquities; those which we would wish to conceal from the eye of the world, and, if it were possible, from ourselves.

The scriptures often remind us to consider ourselves as walking always before GOD, always under the observance of his eye; which ought to make us infinitely more

more vigilant and attentive to our conduct, than if the whole world were ſpectators of it. And indeed, what can more affect the mind of man, than the conſideration that we live under the inſpection of a perfectly holy and omnipotent BEING, who is always about us and within us, as intimate to us as the ſoul is to the body, as inſeparable from us as we are from ourſelves: that his eye ſees all our ways; marks all our ſteps; attends our going out, and our coming in; goes along with us from our firſt entrance into the world, till we depart out of it: that he pierceth the thickeſt darkneſs, penetrates into the cloſeſt receſſes and deepeſt deſigns of the heart: that our moſt ſecret wiſhes and moſt conſpicuous actions, lie equally open to his view: that no where can we cover ourſelves, not even our thoughts, from his eye; no where retire from his preſence, for it fills the univerſe? *If we aſcend into the heaven, he is there; if we go down to hell, he is there alſo. If we take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermoſt parts of the ſea; even there alſo ſhall his hand lead, and his right hand ſhall hold us. If we ſay, Surely the darkneſs ſhall cover us, even the night ſhall be light about us. Yea the darkneſs hideth not from him, but the night ſhineth as the day; the darkneſs and light to him are both alike.* To this omnipreſent and omniſcient GOD be aſcribed all honour and adoration, now and for ever!

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SERMON XXIII.

CAUSES of ERROR.

LUKE xi. 35.

Take heed, therefore, that the light which is in thee be not darkneſs.

IN the verſe preceding the text, our Saviour obſerves, *the light of the body is the eye: therefore when thine eye is ſingle, thy whole body alſo is full of light; but when thine eye is evil, thy body is alſo full of darkneſs.* Which words may be thus paraphraſed: "The reaſon or moral judgment of a man is to the mind what the eye is to the body. If this moral judgment has a true diſcernment of things, and its directions be purſued, it will point out and conduct us in the paths of rectitude and truth. But as, when the eye is blinded, the body muſt of neceſſity move in darkneſs; ſo, if the moral judgment, the eye of the mind, the directing principle of our actions, loſe its diſcernment, or be itſelf darkened by prejudices and paſſions, we ſhall deviate from virtue and truth, and wander whitherſoever imperfect notions or falſe opinions may lead us." Our LORD therefore ſubjoins, *Take heed that the light which is in thee be not darkneſs.* "Take care that the moral judgment, the intellectual light of the mind, be not clouded or obſcured." For this light, placed in us by our CREATOR to direct us in the paths of virtue and happineſs, may be obſcured and extinguiſhed. The eye of the mind, though naturally formed for the diſcernment of truth, may, from ſeveral cauſes, ſuffer in its faculty of perception; and our intellectual ſight may, by various diſorders, be injured and obſtructed.

In order, therefore, that we may comply with the admonition in the text, let us enquire, what are the principal prevailing and general cauſes of error and wrong judgment in matters of religion.

I. And the firſt of theſe is negligence, indifference, inattention,—the certain inlets of error. For it is not the mere uncultivated faculty of reaſon, that informs and

and illuminates the mind; but the vigorous exerciſe, the careful culture and improvement of it, by frequent attention, application, and enquiry. Providence has appointed application and induſtry to be as requiſite to the information and improvement of the mind, as labour and exerciſe are to the health and vigour of the body. There are difficulties in religion; in the ſcriptures, ſome things hard to be underſtood; and in our underſtanding, much weakneſs and imperfection. Without due attention, therefore, we muſt wander in darkneſs and ignorance, and fall into inevitable errors; but with it we may acquire wiſdom and truth, ſo much at leaſt as is neceſſary to ſalvation.

To us favoured as we are with the light of the goſpel, truth is not ſo difficult to inveſtigate, as it was to thoſe who lived in ages unenlightened by revelation. Philoſophers of ancient times complained, that truth was inacceſſible, and lay concealed deep in an abyſs, where no labour, aſſiduity or induſtry, could ever find her. And ſimilar to this ſentiment are ſome expreſſions in the book of Job: *There is,* ſays he, *a vein for the ſilver, and iron is taken out of the earth; but where ſhall wiſdom be found? where is the place of underſtanding?* It is the happier lot of Chriſtians to know where wiſdom, what beſt deſerves the name of wiſdom, is to be found. To us the avenues to truth are open. Let us ſearch the ſcriptures; for there is the place of underſtanding. *Let us then,* as the Royal Preacher adviſes, *carefully apply our hearts unto this wiſdom; let us ſeek her as ſilver, and ſearch for her as for hid treaſures: then ſhall we underſtand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God: then ſhall we underſtand righteouſneſs, and judgment, and equity, yea, every good path.*

Inattention and indifference, with reſpect to religion, are unhappily to be numbered among the characteriſtic evils of modern times. Many there are who excuſe themſelves the trouble of inquiry, take their religion upon truſt, implicitly comply either with received or faſhionable opinions, regardleſs either of the foundation or conſequences of their principles. Happy, if by accident they are right; but in this uncultivated ſtate of mind,

mind, this neglected ſoil, if the ſeeds of error ſhould be ſown, ſeldom or never can they be rooted out.

II. Another common cauſe of error and intellectual darkneſs is ſenſuality. And this conſequence it muſt always produce, according to the natural courſe of things; for, by indulging the paſſions, it indiſpoſes the mind for the contemplation or ſearch of truth. it impairs and depreſſes the very faculty of reaſon, and renders it unfit for intellectual employment. It corrupts even the taſte, and vitiates the reliſh of rational pleaſure. For ſenſuality and reaſon are principles ſo different, that if the former be our favourite entertainment, we ſhall pay leſs regard to the latter; and gradually contract, perhaps, both an indiſpoſition and an incapacity for the juſt exertion of it. But in an uncommon degree does ſenſuality oppoſe religious truth, whichit conſiders as its enemy and accuſer, and avoids as a hated intruder on its peace. The ſenſualiſt who will lay no reſtraints upon himſelf, is ever averſe to the reſtraints of religion, ever averſe to thoſe principles which would intermingle his enjoyments with guilty ſuſpicions that would awake him from his pleaſing deluſion, and torture him with the pain of not being able to juſtify what he reſolves not to amend.

On the other hand, freedom from ſenſual exceſſes and irregular paſſions, is not only an argument that a man is wiſe, but has a natural tendency to make him more ſo. All corrupt paſſions, like a falſe medium, miſrepreſent, and give their own tincture to every thing we view; whereas a pure mind, like a clear eye, has a diſtinct perception of objects, and ſees them in their true colour.

III. Prejudice is another cauſe of erroneous judgment. So extenſive and abſolute is the dominion of prejudice, that perhaps all men are more or leſs under bondage, and no one entirely free from its chains and out of its power. And unhappily its power is too prevalent, where it ought not to appear, in religious inquiries; and always governs moſt abſolutely where its influence is leaſt ſuſpected. Hence it is, that we ſee men ſo determined in ſupport of favourite opinions; maintaining, with obſtinacy, errors that have been once received; and, in

defence

defence of them, holding out againſt the cleareſt light of evidence, and reſiſting every means of conviction. Opinions that have been long familiar to the mind, we grow fond of; we take them, as it were, under our protection, we cheriſh them with the partiality of friendſhip, and diſcourage every attempt againſt them.

This influence of Prejudice is moſt obſervable in the opinions or principles we imbibe in our early years. It is a fortunate circumſtance, if they happen to be agreeable to truth; but if otherwiſe, our prepoſſeſſion in their favour ſeldom permits us to part with them. Such principles are conſidered as ſtandard-truths; and all other opinions are afterwards meaſured by them, and received or rejected as they appear to conform to or differ from them. Hence it is, that errors in religion are almoſt infinite, though it infinitely concerns men to guard againſt them: hence all the various ſects of Chriſtians adhere generally to their reſpective tenets, however contradictory to reaſon, truth, or ſcripture; and hence the way of every individual appears right in his own eyes; and in the midſt of error, danger, and deception, he enjoys all the confidence of ſecurity and truth.

IV. Another means of obſcuring and perverting the judgment, is ſome prevailing inclination, paſſion, or affection. That our affections are generally conſulted, and that not only our actions, but even our opinions, are too much influenced by them, is a ſad truth. A ſlight acquaintance with human nature will inform us, that the affections can bribe and corrupt the judgment; and that the underſtanding is frequently the dupe of the paſſions. When the paſſions are engaged on one ſide of a queſtion, how difficult is it to obſerve a juſt impartiality? Is the evidence defective on the agreeable ſide? imagination is ready to lend its aid, to dreſs up fiction and falſehood is the garb of truth, and to give to poſſibilities the appearance of probability and proof. Is any diſagreeable unwelcome truth to be introduced to us? with what difficulty does it get admittance? An unwelcome truth finds every avenue of the ſoul barred againſt it. By the aſſiſtance of the prevailing paſſion,

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we can practiſe upon the evidence of truth, and keep it out of ſight, and judge and determine juſt as inclination dictates.

And this is not only in ſpeculative matters, but even in points immediately relative to conduct and manners. Let a man, *e. g.* be engaged in ſome criminal purſuit, and under the influence of a governing paſſion; how difficult is it to ſhow him to himſelf, and make his guilt appear to him in a true light? Repreſent to him the unreaſonableneſs, the baſeneſs, the odious nature, the deſtructive tendency of his favourite vice; make it appear that it is the child of Folly, and muſt be the parent of Sorrow and Remorſe; deſcribe its fatal train of conſequences in this world, and alarm him with all the terrors of the next;—what will generally be the conſequence? Will he diſcern and acknowledge his guilt, and return from the error of his ways? or will not rather his ways too often appear to him right, though the end thereof be the ways of death? He will give a ſofter appellation to his vice, paint it in milder colours, and repreſent it in the form and with the features of virtue: or perhaps he will wiſh and hope, that the terrors of futurity may be only pious deluſions, or the fears and fictions of fancy; and theſe hopes and wiſhes will be made to ſerve inſtead of argument and evidence, and be worked up gradually into proof and conviction.

Again, is intereſt or gain the object of the leading paſſion? Its influence in corrupting and miſleading the underſtanding is univerſally admitted. Seldom are arguments juſtly weighed when intereſt holds the ſcales. This paſſion can put out the eye of Reaſon, or throw ſuch a veil over it, as obſtructs the light, intercepts the ſtrongeſt rays of truth, and makes men judge and determine in oppoſition to the cleareſt evidence.

In like manner, if an affectation of ſuperior wiſdom ſhould be the ruling paſſion, this alſo is an enemy to impartial judgment and to truth. To perſons of this caſt, evidence and truth are not objects, ſo much as fame and diſtinction. Vanity can find no gratification in admitting opinions received by the multitude. Inſtead of walking in a plain beaten road, they love, therefore, to quit the common tracks of opinion, to ſearch

ſearch for new ways, and to ſtrike out into by-paths of their own. They conſider it as a mark of vulgar underſtanding to concur in their judgment with others, and go along with the multitude; and therefore treat with contempt all received or eſtabliſhed opinions merely for being ſuch. This gives a bias to all their inquiries, and draws them aſide from the way of truth.

This pride of underſtanding perverts and miſleads the judgment as much as inattention, ſenſuality, prejudice, intereſt or any other prevailing paſſion. For which reaſon we find that it is not always the ſuperior genius that beſt underſtands Religion; and that men of the moſt eminent abilities are ſometimes ſtrenuous opponents of truth, and zealous advocates of error, when their minds happen to be under the influence of intellectual pride, or the vanity of affected wiſdom.

V. Laſtly, The greateſt obſtacle to religious truth is a vitious diſpoſition. *Every one that doth evil, hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, leſt his deeds ſhould be reproved.* When the light of truth is offenſive, we ſhut our eyes againſt it. A vitious man hates the reſtraint of religious principles. With the practice, therefore, he is tempted to throw aſide the profeſſion of religion. Reſolved not to part with his vices, he parts with his faith, in order to be more at eaſe, and have leſs interruption in his purſuits.

Thus it may in ſome meaſure appear, by what various cauſes the moral judgment of the mind may be depraved, and the light within us become darkneſs.

If, then, we would give obedience to the inſtruction in the text, if we would act with wiſdom or virtue, let us, to the utmoſt of our power, endeavour to avoid the various occaſions of error which have been mentioned. Let us not wander in the dark, from indifference, inattention, or prejudice; let not ſenſual exceſſes put out the light of reaſon; let not the ſeductive counſels of intereſt, nor the affectation of ſuperior diſcernment, lead us aſtray from the paths of true wiſdom. Let us keep a ſtrict watch over every favourite paſſion, affection, and inclination, knowing how apt they are to deceive and miſlead. Let us above

all things, reſolve to do the will of God, and be what we ought to be; and then we may be aſſured, that we ſhall know all that is neceſſary to be known in order to obtain his favour: *If any man will do his will*, ſays our bleſſed Saviour, *he ſhall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God.* We may continue ignorant, indeed, of ſome truths contained in the ſcriptures; but of none that are eſſential to ſalvation, and neceſſary to our acceptance with God. Againſt that danger, our Saviour's aſſurance has given us full ſecurity.

And indeed the conſideration of the wiſdom and goodneſs of God will not permit us to doubt, but that his favour will be granted, and his happineſs communicated to us on the juſt and reaſonable terms of exerting our powers in the beſt manner we can to pleaſe him, and our honeſt endeavours to know and to do his will. If, therefore, we have an internal teſtimony in our favour, if our heart bears witneſs to our diligence in inquiring, and our diſpoſition to receive whatever we can diſcover to be the will of God, we need not afflict ourſelves with ſuſpicions and apprehenſions of error; but may have good grounds to truſt that his Spirit will lead us to all neceſſary truth, and will point out the way when we are deſirous to walk in it.

To aid our endeavours, let us not fail to implore the Father of light, the everlaſting Source of knowledge, to dart ſome rays of heavenly wiſdom into our hearts; to illuminate our underſtandings; to direct our ſteps in obedience to his law; and to conduct us through theſe ſhades of ignorance, this veil of darkneſs and of error, to where wiſdom dwells; to thoſe regions of pure unclouded light, where both truth and happineſs are to be found.

SERMON

SERMON XXIV.

DANGER of a late PENITENCE.

Preached in Lent.

ISAIAH lv. 7.

Let the wicked forſake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.

THIS ſeaſon of Lent, the piety of the Chriſtian church has, from her earlieſt and pureſt ages, ſet apart and conſecrated to penitence and devotion. The obſervance of this ancient and pious inſtitution is wiſely preſcribed, in order to remind us of our religious obligations; and that they whoſe diſinclination to the taſk of repentance will ever be urging ſome pretexts for deferring it, might be induced, by the admonition of the church, and by the influence of example, to enter upon it at this ſeaſon; to apply, with a particular vigilance, to the reviſal of their ſpiritual conduct; and by a ſerious attention to the laws of GOD, by frequent meditation and prayer, and, if theſe be not ſufficient, by abſtinence and faſting, to endeavour to correct the wrong propenſions of their nature, to reform the diſorders of the ſoul, and to introduce contrary habits of piety and virtue; which ought not to expire with the ſeaſon, but ſhould be carried on, continued, and improved, as long as we continue in our preſent ſtate of probation.

Though the obligation to repentance is at all ſeaſons equal, yet expedient it is to fix ſome ſtated periods, wherein a more diligent ſcrutiny is to be made into the ſtate and condition of the ſoul; wherein we are to ſearch with more than common vigilance into our

imperfections and corruptions, and obſerve what error wants to be rectified, what paſſion to be ſubdued, what infirmity to be ſtrengthened, and what virtue to be improved; wherein we are to call off the mind from other cares and purſuits, to the moſt important purſuit of all, the care of the one thing needful. This period the wiſdom of the church has thought fit to determine; leſt her ſons, undetermined, might be tempted to defer all attempts towards amendment, till the approach of death ſhould prevent it, or the growing power and influence of ſinful habits might render it impracticable.

In this diſcourſe I ſhall, *1ſt*, Conſider the nature of penitence; and, *2dly*, that we may not poſtpone this important duty, ſhall ſhow, That we can have no aſſurance of ſalvation from a dying ſorrow, or what is commonly called a deathbed-repentance.

Let us conſider the nature of penitence. The firſt preparatory ſtep towards penitence is contrition, or a virtuous ſorrow and ſelf-reproach for paſt offences. When we have a juſt ſenſe of our offences, of our diſobedience and ingratitude to the Higheſt and Beſt of Beings, and of the conſequent danger to which we ſtand expoſed,—both nature and religion preſcribe a ſerious, penitential concern, for having offended; a concern proportioned to the meaſure of our ſins, and as deep as our guilt. What naturally occurs to the firſt reflections of a penitent, is the criminality of his conduct; and this he cannot ſeriouſly review, without an afflicting ſenſe of his unworthineſs, without ſorrow and ſelf-abhorrence, without painful ſenſations of remorſe from the accuſations of his own heart. And if ours be an ingenuous ſorrow, and our hearts are penetrated with a conviction of guilt, it will be accompanied with a determined purpoſe of amendment, and ſincere reſolutions of future obedience. The ſevereſt grief, if not productive of this effect, is not penitential, and ſhould ſeem rather to add to the meaſure of our iniquities, and to the inflictions of divine juſtice, as it ſpeaks a mind conſcious of its iniquity, and yet perſiſting in oppoſition to its own convictions.

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But further; Penitence in the ſcripture notion of it, implies not only ſorrow for ſin, not only a reſolution of amendment; but a new and actual obedience, an actual progreſs in piety and virtue. A good reſolution, till it produces the fruits of repentance, is ſtill only a principle of obedience, but not obedience itſelf. Habitual offenders muſt not only begin, but accompliſh, a moral change of temper and manners, an entire correction of their inclinations and paſſions; and muſt form anew the diſpoſition of the mind. Penitence, in its true ſenſe, is not meant to ſupply the place of righteouſneſs, is not any thing ſubſtituted in its ſtead; but is indeed righteouſneſs itſelf, and is to be conſidered only as another name for religion or moral goodneſs.

II. I proceed to ſhow, that we can have no aſſurance of ſalvation from what is uſually called a death-bed repentance. And this may appear from the following conſiderations.

1*ſt*, It is uncertain whether the ſorrow expreſſed by the ſinner at ſuch a juncture be ſincere, and whether the reſolutions of reformation which he then forms would be productive of actual obedience. The tears of expiring ſinners, there is room to ſuſpect, flow not ſo much from a virtuous ſorrow, from an ingenuous remorſe, from due conviction of the hateful nature of ſin, and of their ingratitude to Heaven, as from the near proſpect of an approaching diſſolution, and the immediate apprehenſions of impending vengeance.

To expreſs the anguiſh of our ſoul upon a death-bed, when all our proſpects are gloomy; when to the eye of faith no beam of hope, no diſtant ray of happineſs, appears, when we can ſee nothing behind us but unrepented guilt, and nothing before us but the apprehended conſequences and juſt puniſhment of it,—is natural and unavoidable; and all the pious reſolutions, all the vows of reformation and amendment, then made, may have in them little or no virtue. Experience ſhows, that eaſe, ſecurity, and health, often cancel the vows made by apprehenſion, pain, and ſickneſs; and that all the religious remorſe, the penitential tears, the purpoſes of obedience, extorted from a dying ſinner by the terrors

of diſſolution and the approach of futurity, vaniſh and diſappear, *like as a dream when one awaketh*, without any impreſſion of virtue left upon the mind, as ſoon as a recovery from ſickneſs removes thoſe apprehenſions, and that proſpect, from his view. As the fear of immediate death vaniſhes, good reſolutions are forgotten; and as bodily ſtrength recovers, folly and vice recover ſtrength too.

But let us admit a death-bed ſorrow to be ſincere, and of ſo ingenuous a nature that it would be certainly effectual in producing true repentance were an opportunity of the trial allowed; yet ſtill, as it is only ſorrow, accompanied with a pious reſolution, it is only a ſtep towards repentance, but not repentance complete. For the ſcripture-idea of repentance, as was before obſerved, implies not only ſorrow for ſin, not only a ſteady purpoſe of amendment, but that purpoſe carried into execution by a new and actual obedience. All the precepts of the goſpel require, and all its promiſes are annexed to, obedience, to holineſs, to habitual piety, without which no man ſhall ſee the LORD.

After a life worn out in vice and iniquity, is it reaſonable to expect we ſhould be carried up to heaven upon the wings of a few vows or prayers, in old age, or on a death-bed? Can we ſuppoſe a heavenly inheritance to be the eaſy purchaſe of a ſigh or a tear, of a ſuperficial ſorrow, or an ineffective reſolution? Can we think, that confeſſing and lamenting our ſins, and purpoſing to forſake them when we can ſin no longer, will atone for years waſted in iniquity? No: it ſhould ſeem equally as reaſonable, in the beginning of life, to pray that GOD would diſpenſe with the obſervance of his laws, and excuſe us the trouble of obedience, as at the end of it to ſupplicate his acceptance of us without it.

There are good grounds to believe, that our capability of happineſs hereafter will depend upon the moral frame and temper of the mind, upon the virtuous habits and diſpoſitions we have contracted here. But it is to the ſinner a work of time, and labour, and perſeverance, to oppoſe and conquer paſſions to which he has long ſurrendered himſelf, to ſubdue habits which have long enſlaved

ed him, and to accompliſh an entire change or moral revolution in his mind, and conſequently to render himſelf capable of happineſs. Some perſons indeed there are, who pretend to an immediate regeneration, or new birth, —to an inſtantaneous tranſition from a life of ſin and guilt, to a ſtate of purity and holineſs. But ſuch perſons ſhould ſeem to deceive themſelves, by miſtaking a pious reſolution for complete repentance and amendment. A good reſolution may be immediately formed upon ſome conſiderations ſuddenly preſenting themſelves to the mind; but an immediate change of the deſires and affections, an inſtantaneous transformation from a vitious to a virtuous frame of mind, is neither conſiſtent with common obſervation, or with the nature of habits.

Habits which have long had dominion over the mind, will long maintain the poſſeſſion of it; and can only be conquered, as they gained ground, by ſlow and gradual advances. And though a dying ſinner, under the circumſtances in which he then finds himſelf, may not be ſenſible of their dominion, nor feel their power; yet this can give him no aſſurance of his deliverance or exemption from them. When inclinations, though not planted by nature, but of our own raiſing, are become habitual, they are engrafted, as it were, into the ſoul, mixed with its frame, and as hard to be rooted out as thoſe that are natural. Such is the difficulty of ſubduing habits; ſuch, conſequently, the diſability the ſinner lies under of obtaining happineſs.

We are indeed aſſured, that whenever a ſinner returns to God, he will have mercy upon him, and will abundantly pardon: but let us be careful rightly to underſtand what it is to return to God. As forſaking him does not mean neglecting to make him for ſome time the object of our thoughts, but a vitious converſation; ſo we have reaſon to conclude, that returning to God is not a ſudden, importunate application to him, but a virtuous life. We muſt not preſume, indeed, to preſcribe bounds to the Divine Goodneſs; nor ſay, *Hitherto ſhall it come, and no further:* but this we may juſtly aſſert, that whoever expects happineſs without holineſs, whoever hopes to be admitted into heaven without actual

tual obedience, without an actual progreſs in virtue and goodneſs, expects admittance upon other terms than are propoſed in the Goſpel.

Since, then, ſuch is the danger of a dependence on a death-bed ſorrow, it highly concerns us not to delay the neceſſary work of reformation and amendment. Various conſiderations might be offered to evince the unreaſonableneſs of poſtponing this duty. But let us conſider only the uncertainty of life, and we muſt ſee the imprudence of riſking our ſalvation on the doubtful expectation of a late penitence. For can we be inſenſible of the precarious tenure by which life is held? Do we not daily ſee the healthy and ſecure ſurpriſed by the hand of Death; and though gay and flouriſhing as a flower in the field, yet as ſoon cut down and withered? Why then ſhould we place the whole dependence of our ſouls upon the continuance of a life which the next hour may demand from us; why preſume upon a ſecure and long poſſeſſion of what hangs by a ſlender thread, which a thouſand accidents may break aſunder? What veil is it that is drawn before the eyes of men, and hides from them the tranſitory, uncertain nature of their preſent ſtate?

Surely, did we conſider, and amazing it is that we ſhould not frequently conſider, our own mortality, we would not riſk the ſhorteſt delay in a matter ſo conſequential, nor leave ſo important and irretrievable a ſtake to any degree of hazard and uncertainty. Death may come haſtily upon us, and ſurpriſe us in the midſt of our preſumed ſecurity, in a day when we look not for him. But let us ſuppoſe, that this king of terrors, this univerſal conqueror, may not ſurpriſe us at an hour when we are not aware; but may give us previous notice, may make his attack by ſlow forms and regular approaches, and may ſend ſome diſeaſe to be the meſſenger of his coming; yet how know we, whether we may have power to perform what requires great attention and compoſure of mind, of which the pains of diſeaſe, or the diſorder of our intellectual faculties may render us utterly incapable? or, if we have power, whether we may then have an inclination to attempt a duty to which long, inveterate habits may have ſtrengthened

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and confirmed our natural averſion? Or, laſtly, were the ſtroke of death ſo eaſy and gentle, that we were free from any ſevere corporeal pain, or intellectual diſorder; were our inclinations to repent and return to God devout and ſincere; yet, as they could be productive only of ſorrow for ſin, or a reſolution to forſake it, this would not be ſtrictly repentance, but only an introduction or preparative to it.

Let what has been ſuggeſted prevail with us to lay hold on the opportunity now offered (which to ſome of us may poſſibly prove the laſt), of turning to God by newneſs of life. Let not this holy ſeaſon, which the piety of our church has ſet apart for the more ſolemn duties of penitence, ſlip out of our hands unregarded and unimproved; and inſtead of bringing us nearer to God, ſeparate and remove us to a wider diſtance from him; and, inſtead of being employed in expiating and imploring forgiveneſs of our ſins, be itſelf added to the number of them. *Humble thyſelf before thou be ſick*, ſays the Author of the Book of Eccleſiaſticus, *and in the time of ſin ſhew repentance. Let nothing hinder thee to pay thy vows in due time, and defer not till death to be juſtified.*

Let us then comply with the duties ſuggeſted in this ſeaſon of devotion, and begin without delay a repentance not to be repented of, and reſolve to pay a determined, immediate, and univerſal obedience to the divine will. So ſhall the conſciouſneſs of that obedience ſupport us in this world, and the well-grounded hopes of meeting a reconciled God ſmooth our paſſage into the next.

SERMON

SERMON XXV.

On Humility.

1 Pet. v. 5.

Be cloathed with humility.

AMONG the whole catalogue of virtues, few ſeem to be held in higher eſtimation by the inſpired writers, or come more frequently recommended to our attention, than Humility. This is a virtue of high rank, very different from puſillanimity, or meanneſs of ſpirit. It conſiſts, not in low, derogatory ideas of human nature in general, nor in ſelf-contempt, or forming an opinion of ourſelves more to our diſadvantage than we deſerve; for that may not always be in our power. Conſcious of our own ability or merit, we cannot differ from our own conſciouſneſs. Humility conſiſts rather in that unaſſuming, ingenuous diſpoſition of mind, which proceeds from an impartial judgment of ourſelves, from a juſt and equal eſtimate of our own advantages and defects, compared with thoſe of others. Its uſual companions are, meekneſs, gentleneſs, candour: virtues of the faireſt complexion, fit attendants on ſuch frail and imperfect creatures as we are. It is nearly allied to mercy and kindneſs, and may indeed claim an affinity with almoſt every virtue. In many of its features, it reſembles the portrait of Charity, as drawn by St. Paul: *It ſuffereth long, and is kind, envieth not, is not puffed up, doth not behave itſelf unſeemly.*

What I propoſe in this diſcourſe is, to ſhow more explicitly the nature of humility, and by what conduct it may beſt appear. But ſince infinite, almoſt, is the variety of circumſtances and ſituations wherein the different ranks and orders of men are arranged, and the actions flowing from thence not to be enumerated nor ſingly and particularly deſcribed,—we muſt limit the conſideration of this virtue, therefore, to the general denominations of perſons towards whom it is to be exerciſed, viz. ſuperiors, inferiors, and equals.

I. Our

I. Our ſuperiors in rank or ſtation are intitled to that meaſure of ſubmiſſion which the well-being of ſociety, the laws of order, and eſtabliſhed forms of reſpect, require: and Humility will teach us to acknowledge their ſuperiority; to pay honour where honour is due; to ſuppreſs every inclination to aſperſe or depreciate their character or conduct; to feel no complacency in obſerving errors, or detecting foibles; knowing that we ourſelves are of like paſſions, ſubject to the ſame defects, the ſame foibles and errors, which we are ſo quick to diſcern, and ſo forward to reprehend, in others. Though not reſtricted from cenſuring the moſt elevated characters, Humility will incline us not to be extreme, to mark what is amiſs, but to make every equitable allowance, and to moderate and temper cenſure with candour.

With regard to thoſe who are ſuperior in intellectual talents, humility conſiſts, not in a mean adulation or dependence, not in an implicit ſubmiſſion to their judgment and underſtanding, and an obſequious ſervility of our own: but in paying a deference to ſuperior wiſdom in docility of diſpoſition, and an ear always open to inſtruction; in ſuppreſſing all emotions of envy againſt the happier attainments and accompliſhments of others; in acknowledging their poſſeſſion, and applauding their improvement, of uſeful talents.

One particular alone there is, wherein even Humility does not require us to acknowledge any ſuperior. We may admit the ſuperiority of others in the powers of the mind or the acquiſitions of fortune, in wiſdom and knowledge, in the diſtinctions created by wealth, honour, and ſtation; but, in the qualities of the heart, in rational piety, virtue and goodneſs, let us yield to no one the precedence. It is a moſt laudable ambition to emulate the beſt, to aim at the higheſt moral excellence we can conceive; and we ought to bluſh to confeſs ourſelves inferior to the firſt characters in integrity, benevolence, and goodneſs of heart.

II. But as the object of our duty changes, ſo alſo will the method by which we muſt diſcharge it. Towards our equals humility will manifeſt itſelf by an obliging deportment, ſtudious rather to decline than challenge

lenge pre-eminence; in being juſt to the merits of others, though diffident of our own; not affecting to be thought what we are not, nor oſtentations of what we are; not thinking more highly of ourſelves than we ought to think; nor diſplaying our own merit, nor publiſhing our own praiſe; but, conſcious of frailty, and knowing that no human excellence exiſts without a mixture of human weakneſs, inclined rather to ſuſpect in ourſelves ſome latent fault or defect, which may be viſible to others, though ſelf-partiality may throw a veil over it, and conceal it from ourſelves.

When we look abroad, and obſerve how apt almoſt every one is to overvalue his own merit, to over-rate the accompliſhments he has, and to imagine himſelf poſſeſſed of thoſe he has not, it is natural to bring home with us a ſuſpicion, that we ourſelves may fall into the ſame error, and be ſubject to the ſame weakneſs. We ought, therefore, to be diſpoſed to make all reaſonable conceſſions and favourable preſumptions; and rather to recede from our own juſt claim, than arrogate unjuſtly ought to ourſelves. Humility, like Charity, ſeeketh not her own. Every humble mind, conſcious of its imperfections, will be naturally inclined to yield the precedence even to its equals.

III. But further: with regard to inferiors, Humility conſiſts in aſſuming no more than the outward diſtinction of circumſtances and the order of ſociety render unavoidable. Humility forbids us to ſeek our own gratification in the inferiority of others; forbids us to look down with contempt on thoſe to whom Providence has diſpenſed its favours with a more parſimonious hand; forbids us to inſult their imperfections of body or mind, or to glory in a barbarous triumph over the lowneſs of their birth, fortunes, employments, or abilities; forbids us to deſpiſe even the loweſt and meaneſt,——thoſe who may ſeem leaſt to deſerve, but moſt need, our regard.

We ought, on the contrary, to make our poſſeſſions and enjoyments ſubſervient to their wants; and by kind condeſcenſions, to ſoften ſuperiority; being conſcious that we all belong to the ſame claſs of beings; are all partakers of the ſame nature, and equal heirs of its

its corruption; deſcended from the ſame ſtock; and that the ſame duſt is our original, and our end. The wiſdom of Providence has been pleaſed to conſtitute a great diverſity of ranks and ſubordinations in human life; but this diſtinction of circumſtances was not meant to give ſuperiority an occaſion to inſult, but to aſſiſt, its inferiors; it was deſigned to promote the general happineſs, to make room for every virtue,—for thoſe proper to ſubjection and dependence, and thoſe alſo which can appear only in ſuperior ſtations.

The duty of the text has now been in general explained; but a difficulty ſtill remains, how we may aſſure ourſelves whether we poſſeſs this virtue, or how this general doctrine may be applied to particular caſes. For what is in truth ſupercilious and faulty pride, the proud man may conſider only as greatneſs of ſpirit, a due regard to ſuperior diſtinction, a proper dignity which he aſſumes as becoming his rank and ſtation. And this is indeed the common method by which the injudicious deceive themſelves, and the guilty palliate their faults; by a miſapplication of names, giving to vice the appellation of ſome reſembling virtue.

The only reply to this difficulty is, That, in the particular determination of our actions, every man's conſcience muſt be his caſuiſt, and every man's judgment his final rule. But it concerns us impartially to conſult the unbiaſſed dictates of reaſon, not to cover any vice under the veil of a borrowed name; but, laying aſide, as far as may be, all ſelf-partiality, to examine our conduct by that ſacred and moſt equitable rule, of behaving to others as we ſhould think it reaſonabe in them to behave to ourſelves; and then we may be able to diſtinguiſh between the falſe gloſſes and the true reaſoning of the mind.

In order to engage our attention to this duty of humility, it might be proper to obſerve how much both our virtue and our happineſs may be promoted by it. If this ſpirit once take poſſeſſion of us, it will lead us peaceably through this vale of troubles; it will guard us, in a great meaſure, from the turbulent paſſions of others and from our own, and from the many uneaſineſſes which take their riſe from both. It will preſerve a ſe-

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renity within us, and create no enemy without; will give us to enjoy that peace of mind which is the chief conſtituent of happineſs; that tranquillity which the ambitious always purſue, but never poſſeſs. It will kill in us the ſeeds of pride, the vice that ſticks cloſeſt to our nature; the firſt generally that appears, the laſt that forſakes us; often diſſembled indeed, ſometimes ſuppreſſed, but ſeldom ſubdued: a vice that aſſumes ſuch different forms, veils itſelf under ſuch a variety of unſuſpected appearances, and ſteals upon us ſo unobſerved, that there is no one weakneſs that oftener makes its way into the heart; but yet a vice that ill befits the weak, indigent, and dependent condition of man. For wherein is boaſting? What have we that we have not received? Who is it that maketh us to differ from another? All we are, and all we have, we derive from the bounteous GIVER of all good gifts. What we call our own acquiſitions, we owe to HIM, who gives both ability to purſue, and ſucceſs in the purſuit.

This duty of humility comes frequently recommended to us in the goſpel; and the greateſt examples of piety recorded in the ſcriptures have been eminent for this virtue. Abraham, though ſtyled the Friend of GOD, humbled himſelf with the name of duſt and aſhes. The father of the patriarchs acknowledged, that he was leſs than the leaſt of GOD's mercies. And the great apoſtle of the Gentiles, who was taken up into heaven, and had revelations imparted to him too glorious for human language to deſcribe, yet conſidered himſelf as the leaſt of the apoſtles, not meet to be called an apoſtle.

In the ſacred writings we often find the Divine BEING approving this virtue of Humility. *Thus ſaith the high and mighty One that inhabiteth eternity, whoſe name is holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him alſo that is of a contrite ſpirit.* Again: *To this man will I look, ſaith the Lord, even to him that is poor, and of a contrite ſpirit, and trembleth at my word.* If, then GOD, who is ſo high, hath yet reſpect unto the lowly, let not Man think it a degradation of the brighteſt accompliſhments, or the moſt elevated ſtation, to be of an humble ſpirit.

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When, indeed, we contemplate the ſtupendous glory and majeſty of the Almighty SOVEREIGN of the univerſe: when we conſider, that he has heaven for his throne, and earth for his footſtool; that the wide expanſe of heaven is to him only as a curtain or tent to dwell in; that he inhabits and fills a ſpace extended beyond all bounds, the dimenſions of which numbers added to numbers can never equal; that in his ſight man is but as a worm, and all nations of the earth only as the ſmall duſt of the balance, as nothing, or as leſs than nothing, if leſs were poſſible: —when we thus contemplate the divine greatneſs, how little and unimportant muſt every thing appear that we call great upon earth! how mean all human preeminence! how diminutive the grandeur of the world! how inconſiderable the diſtinctions of power, wealth, and ſtation, on which we ſet ſo high a value! Viewed in this light, all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them, almoſt vaniſh and ſink to nothing.

But when we conſider withal, that this LORD of the univerſe himſelf, who hath his dwelling ſo high, who is infinite in dignity and greatneſs, is yet equally infinite in his condeſcenſion, and humbleth himſelf to behold the things that are on earth,—humbleth himſelf to hear, and to relieve, the leaſt, the loweſt, the moſt unworthy of his creatures, that call upon him; this ſurely ſhould incline us to imitate the benevolence of ſuch humility; and not to treat with arrogance, nor with contemptuous neglect paſs by the meaneſt of our afflicted fellow-creatures, who look up to us for aſſiſtance; nor to think any condeſcenſions beneath us that may remove or alleviate their ſorrows.

Laſtly, let us turn our eyes to the bleſſed Founder of our religion, who was not only the firſt that taught this doctrine of humility, but was himſelf the great pattern and example of it; who ſubmitted to the infirmities of a nature ſo much inferior to his own; whoſe whole life was one continued ſcene of condeſcenſions. The indigence of his birth, the indignities of his life, the ignominy of his death, equally proclaim him meek and lowly in heart. Let us his diſciples follow our Lord

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in the paths of humility: let the ſame mind be in us; that, like him, we may be received hereafter into thoſe bleſſed manſions, where lowlineſs of mind will be crowned with glory, and the humble ſhall be exalted.

SERMON XXVI.

On CHARITY and MERCY.

Preached on occaſion of a public collection for the benefit of the Royal Infirmary at Edinburgh.

MATTH. v. 7.

Bleſſed are the merciful; for they ſhall obtain mercy.

THE virtue of mercy, recommended in the text, is a principal duty of religion. Whether we judge of its importance from its affinity to the Divine Nature, from its ſalutary influence on Society, or its utility to Individuals, we ſhall find it equal, if not ſuperior, in rank and eminence, to every other virtue. Our SAVIOUR, therefore, in delivering his doctrine for the inſtruction of the world, takes care to diſtinguiſh this duty, to aſſign it a principal place in his moral ſyſtem, and to recommend it to our practice as of the happieſt conſequence to ourſelves: *Bleſſed are the merciful, for they ſhall obtain mercy.*

In this diſcourſe I ſhall offer ſome conſiderations to recommend this duty to your attention.

I. If we obſerve and conſider our moral frame, we ſhall find that we are by nature formed to feel for the afflicted; that we are under a powerful determination to the exertion, as well as the approbation, of Mercy; and

and that, if there be any part of the divine law engraven upon our heart in deeper characters than others, it is this. There is in the human mind, a compaſſionate ſenſe, a benevolent inſtinct, a ſocial ſympathy, which touches us with the ſenſations and paſſions of others, and makes their pains and ſorrows our own. Let us attend to the emotions of our heart when objects of ſevere diſtreſs are preſented to our view. Are we not conſcious of ſomething within us that pleads for the unhappy, and bids us ſtretch out our hand to their relief? Is it not with ſome violence to ourſelves that we harden our heart, or turn away our attention from the tears of the unfortunate? Are we not ſelf-reproached when we with-hold our aſſiſtance, or hide ourſelves from their miſery? and, on the contrary, do we not feel a ſecret complacency, a ſelf-gratulating joy, riſe in our mind, when we have laid hold on any occaſion that offered, to impart conſolation to the afflicted, to raiſe the heart that was ſinking under the burden of its ſorrows, or to brighten up the dejected countenance into joy and gladneſs? As natural it is to feel an inward ſatisfaction, and a virtuous joy of heart, in relieving the wants of the afflicted, as it is for them to rejoice in having thoſe wants relieved.

The merciful man is kind to himſelf, as well as to the objects of his compaſſion; and receives an equivalent in moral enjoyment, for the enjoyment he beſtows. Compaſſion may indeed ſeem to make a large addition to the troubles to which we are born, by rendering us ſubject to the pains and infirmities of others, and making us feel ſorrows and misfortunes that are not our own. But yet the ſatisfaction which ariſes from mitigating thoſe pains, and alleviating thoſe ſorrows, will more than compenſate ſuch uneaſineſs; upon which account, Solomon has well obſerved, that *a merciful man does good to his own ſoul, but he that is cruel troubleth his own fleſh.* There is a conſcious pleaſure in the reflections of the merciful, which, as the ſame author expreſſes it, does good like a medicine; whereas the reflections of the cruel and oppreſſive, muſt embitter their happieſt hours, and mingle gall with every enjoyment. Oppreſſion muſt be painful even to

the oppreſſor: and though habits may go far in gradually changing our nature, and rendering the heart callous and unfeeling; yet it is hardly to be conceived, that a man can oppreſs the miſerable, and afflict the afflicted, without doing great violence to himſelf.

As the pleaſures of the mind are in the ſcale of enjoyments, higher and juſtly preferable to thoſe of ſenſe; ſo, of all mental pleaſures, the moſt valuable are thoſe of the moral and ſocial kind. The exertion of kindneſs, benevolence and compaſſion, produces a moſt ſubſtantial and laſting pleaſure; a pleaſure not only ſuperior to others in its immediate enjoyment, but of a much more durable and permanent nature. It does not, like ſenſual pleaſures, take its flight the moment it is enjoyed; nor is it ſubject to ſatiety and diſguſt; much leſs is it followed by repentance or remorſe; but is always grateful, is renewed by every ſubſequent reflection.

The pleaſures of ſenſe, indeed, ſcarce outlive the actions they attend; they immediately vaniſh, ſome in vanity, others in vexation of ſpirit, and all of them deſert us in the needful time of trouble. But the pleaſure of good actions never forſakes us: it is a faithful friend, that will attend us in the worſt of fortunes, and will wonderfully ſupport us under them. When we walk in the midſt of trouble, or even in the vale of death, this will ſtand by and comfort us. The kind compaſſion we have ſhown to the diſtreſs of others, will then mightily lighten the burden of our own. Then the bleſſing of him that was ready to periſh will come upon us, becauſe we delivered the poor when he cried, the fatherleſs, and him that had none to help.

II. If we look up to the Supreme Being, we ſhall find that nothing can be more acceptable to him, or make us approach nearer to his nature, or render us more the objects of favour, than works of beneficence and mercy. God is love. He is good to all, and his mercies are over all his works. He crowns us with his loving kindneſs; ſupplies our various daily returning wants; pours down on his creatures bleſſings and bounties with a liberal hand; and is ever communicating good, and diffuſing happineſs, through the immenſity of the univerſe.

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Would we, then, recommend ourſelves to this all-gracious PARENT of good? would we be aſſured of his favour? Let us copy the Divine Original; let us tranſcribe into our life and manners ſome ſimilitude of his goodneſs and compaſſion; let us improve in ourſelves the moral image of our MAKER, and endeavour to be merciful as he is merciful. The perfections of his nature place him infinitely above the need or poſſibility of requital from his creatures; and the principal return he requires, is, that we ſhould be careful to imitate his goodneſs, to ſupply the place of Providence to the neceſſitous and indigent, and to have compaſſion on our fellow-ſervants, as our LORD hath pity on us.

III. Though the diſtinctions ariſing from affluence and indigence appear to be ſo unequally allotted to mankind by the ſupreme SOVEREIGN of the world, and with ſo little regard to moral qualifications, that this irregular diſtribution, this appearance of a partial and unequal care of his creatures, expreſſed in the differences of their rank and condition, has been ſometimes formed into an objection againſt the adminiſtration of his providence; yet it is not from any partiality in GOD, who is no reſpecter of perſons, nor from any defect in his care of his creatures, that the poor are always with us. If it had been agreeable to his unerring wiſdom, it was infinitely eaſy to his almighty power to have levelled all diſtinctions, and to have diffuſed the riches of the world in equal diſtributions among mankind: or, if he ſaw it good, he who ſupported the people of Iſrael in a barren wilderneſs with bread from heaven; he who commanded the ravens to feed his prophet, and conveyed unſeen ſupplies to the poor widow's meal and oil, ſo that it did not waſte nor fail,—might ſtill, by his immediate interpoſition, or by numberleſs methods to us unknown, diſſipate all the cares and relieve all the wants of his creatures himſelf. But his wiſdom chooſes to ſend man to man for relief, and to convey his bounty to the poor through the channels of the rich.

A little attention might convince us, that the various claſſes of mankind, the numberleſs diverſities of rank, ſtation, and condition, execute a wiſe and benevolent

plan of Providence, are neceſſary to preſerve the order and well-being of ſociety, and to connect and endear mankind to each other. But it ought to be remembered, that eminence of power, wealth, or ſtation, only conſtitutes us ſuperior ſervants in this great family of the world; and that we are commanded by the ſupreme Houſeholder, the LORD of the uniuerſe, to do juſtice to our fellow ſervants, and to give them their meat in due ſeaſon. Let not thoſe who abound in wealth, and have much goods laid up for many years, let them not imagine, that theſe favours are granted merely for the purpoſes of perſonal indulgence, only to enable them to bid their ſouls take their eaſe, and to fare ſumptuouſly every day. Their wealth ought rather to be conſidered as a fund, of which a portion is to be applied to their own uſe, but another part to be appropriated to the payment of thoſe debts of mercy that are due to the neceſſitous and indigent: nor can we be juſtified in engroſſing and hoarding up the bounty of Heaven, farther than may conſiſt with this equitable claim of the poor and needy.

The beſt uſe of riches is to be rich in good works. Never apprehend danger of waſting your ſubſtance by being merciful after your power; by giving plenteouſly, if you have much; or, if you have little, by doing your diligence gladly to give of that little. For when do we ſee a fortune ruined or impaired by the alms of charity and mercy? It is not charity; it is luxury, intemperance, pride, profligacy, and other vices, which are the wings that riches make to themſelves when they fly away. The ſcripture abounds with promiſes of the immediate bleſſing of Heaven upon this duty of mercy. *Thou ſhalt ſurely give unto thy poor brother; and thine heart ſhall not be grieved when thou giveſt unto him, becauſe that for this thing the Lord thy God ſhall bleſs thee in all thy works, and in all that thou putteſt thine hand unto. If thou draw out thy ſoul to the hungry, and ſatisfy the afflicted ſoul, then ſhall thy light riſe in obſcurity, and thy darkneſs ſhall be as the noon-day; and the Lord ſhall guide thee continually, and thou ſhalt be like a watered garden, and like a ſpring of water, whoſe waters fail not.* And reaſonable it is to believe, that the eyes of the LORD, which are in every

every place, will more particularly watch over the righteous; and that his providence will, even in this world, diſtinguiſh with peculiar favour thoſe whom the virtues of charity and mercy recommend to his protection.

But however the divine wiſdom may ſee fit to order this, ſure we are, that laſtly, in the final event of things, at the great and awful judgment of the laſt day, the merciful man ſhall obtain mercy; and this is of much more moment to him than every other conſideration. There is indeed a pleaſure and ſatisfaction in the very acts of mercy, and in the hopes that we are objects of God's preſent favour; but the higheſt conſolation is, that charity will ſecure us an intereſt, and beſpeak the divine favour, at that laſt deciſive tribunal that will fix our fate for ever. Then it is the memory of our good deeds will ſtand by and ſupport us: every good action we have done, among others the charity of this day, will bear witneſs on our behalf; and our mercy to others will plead for mercy to ourſelves. For the great inquiry there, will, according to our Saviour's deſcription, principally turn upon acts of charity and mercy.

The forms and ſolemnities of that judgment, as deſcribed in the goſpel, may bear ſome reſemblance to thoſe obſerved in human courts of judicature; but very different will be the rule of proceeding. At that awful bar, we ſhall be tried, not only for ſins of commiſſion, but for thoſe of omiſſion alſo; not only for the violation, but the neglect, of duties; not merely for our iniquity, but our want of charity and mercy. Little it will avail us to ſay, (if we could ſay), that we have committed no wrong, if we have done no good. In vain ſhall we plead, (though we might truly plead), that we have been regular in our devotions, temperate in pleaſures, faithful to our promiſes, juſt in our dealings, if at the ſame time we have not been merciful after our power.

What confuſion of face muſt cover us at that awful tribunal, when an account of our powers of doing good, and withal the abuſe of thoſe powers, ſhall be produced againſt us! How ſhall we then wiſh, (though in vain), that we could redeem the time paſt, and recal the years that are fled; or that we might be permitted to enter into life a ſecond time, and be born again, in order to

improve every opportunity to the purpoſes of mercy, and to fill up every hour with kind offices to others, which will at that tribunal prove ſo beneficial and happy to ourſelves!

Let us, then, anticipate the great day of account; let us imagine ourſelves at the bar of Heaven, and aſk the queſtions that will be then demanded of us: Have I, according to my power, fed the hungry? Have I clothed the naked? Have I relieved the ſick? Have I ſupplied the wants of the indigent and neceſſitous? If to theſe interrogatories Conſcience can faithfully reply in the affirmative, we are then thoſe happy ſervants whom our Judge will bid to enter into the joy of our LORD. But if our heart condemn us, conſcious that we have been deficient, and have left undone thoſe works of mercy that we ought to have done; let us, that we may avoid the dreadful ſentence that will in that caſe be pronounced, let us no longer refuſe mercy to others, leſt we ourſelves find judgment without mercy; and no longer ſtop our ears at the cry of the poor, leſt we alſo cry, and not be heard: Let us cheriſh a humane, benevolent diſpoſition; and give full ſcope to the exertion of kindneſs, compaſſion and bounty, towards proper objects,——rejoicing when it is in our power to relieve diſtreſs, and grieved when it is not. Let us be merciful after our power; benevolent enough to take in all objects of compaſſion, but prudent enough to ſelect the moſt deſerving.

Frequent indeed are the miſtakes of the charitable heart and the liberal hand; nor is it always eaſy, to diſtinguiſh between real and counterfeit diſtreſs: but here permit me to obſerve, that your benevolence is now requeſted for the relief of ſome who have an undoubted claim to compaſſion, as they ſuffer under one of the greateſt diſtreſſes our nature is liable to; for ſuch ſurely is poverty aggravated by ſickneſs,—laborious poverty, diſabled from earning the honeſt reward of induſtry. Were it our lot to lie down in ſorrow, and languiſh on the bed of ſickneſs, like thoſe who this day crave your compaſſionate aid, how fervent would we be in our ſupplications to Heaven? with what vows and prayers would we ſolicit and importune the reſtoration of health? But

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how little ſhould we deſerve a favour that we are diſinclined to grant! Upon what grounds could we expect that mercy for ourſelves, if we now refuſe it to our fellow-creatures? Or, if we now happily poſſeſs that firſt of earthly bleſſings, Health; what more pious acknowledgment, what more grateful offering, can we make to Heaven than this oblation of charity? what more proper expreſſion of our gratitude to God, than thus to have compaſſion on our afflicted Brethren? what more certain and effectual method to derive on us the bleſſings of HIM who is the Comforter of the ſick, the Father of the fatherleſs, the Protector of him that hath no helper, than thus to imitate the divine goodneſs, and to be merciful as he is merciful?

May your charitable offerings on this occaſion aſcend as incenſe to the throne of God, and be accepted as a ſacrifice well-pleaſing to him. May they recommend you to the divine favour; and as the objects of your mercy cannot recompenſe you, may you be recompenſed at the reſurrection of the juſt!

END OF VOLUME FIRST.

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